

KENKYO, KENJITSU O MOTTO NI IKITE ORIMASU

I Will Live with Humility and Dependability as My Motto

**- Volume 2 -
MIDDLE SCHOOL ARC**

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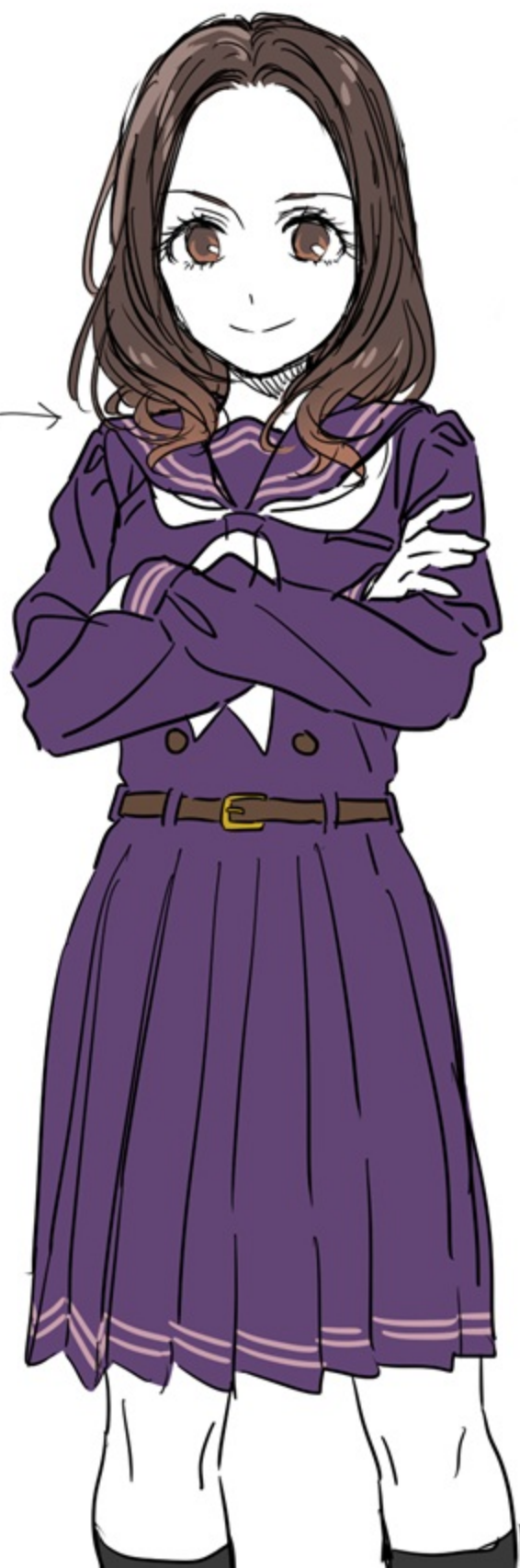


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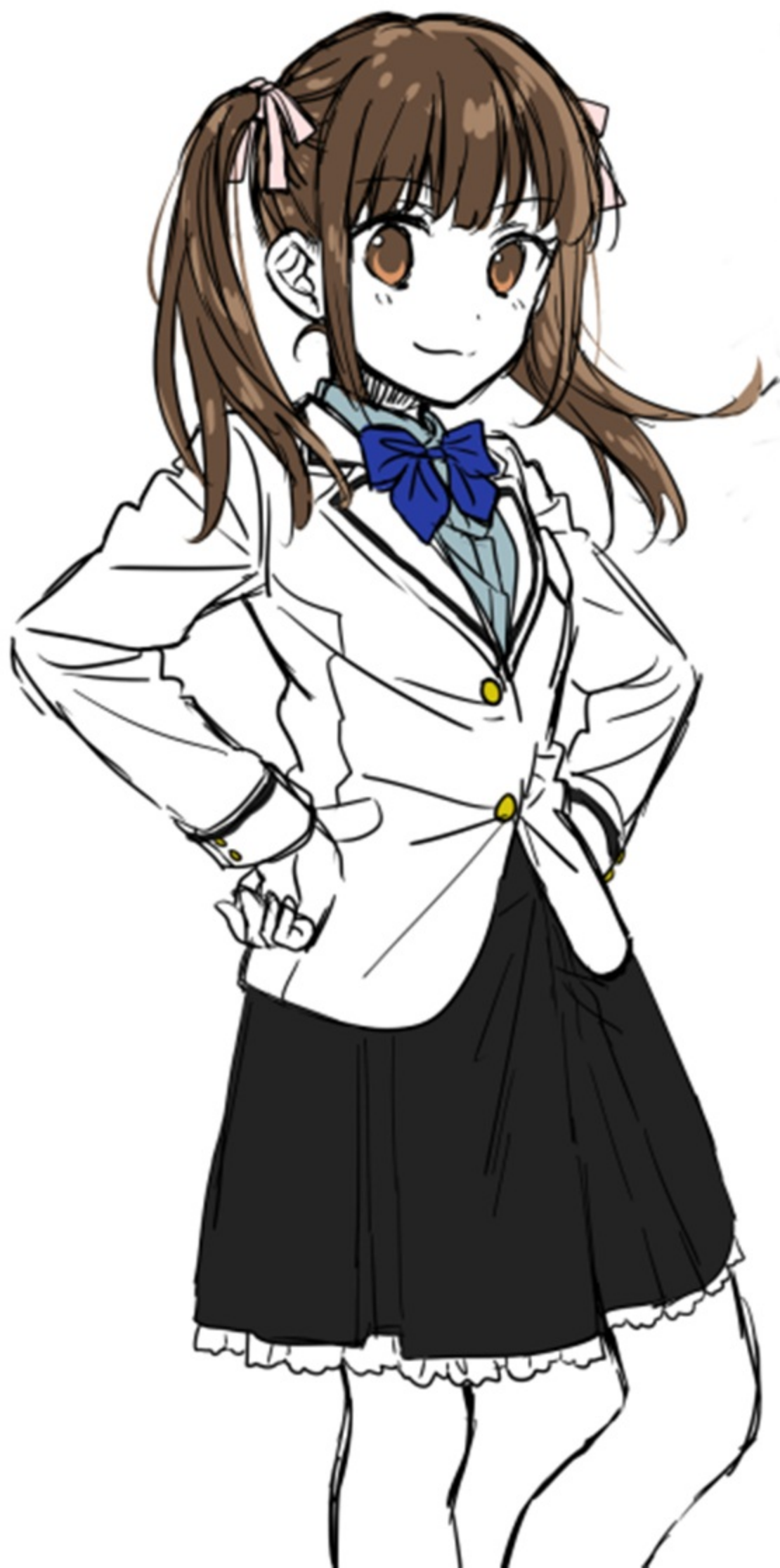
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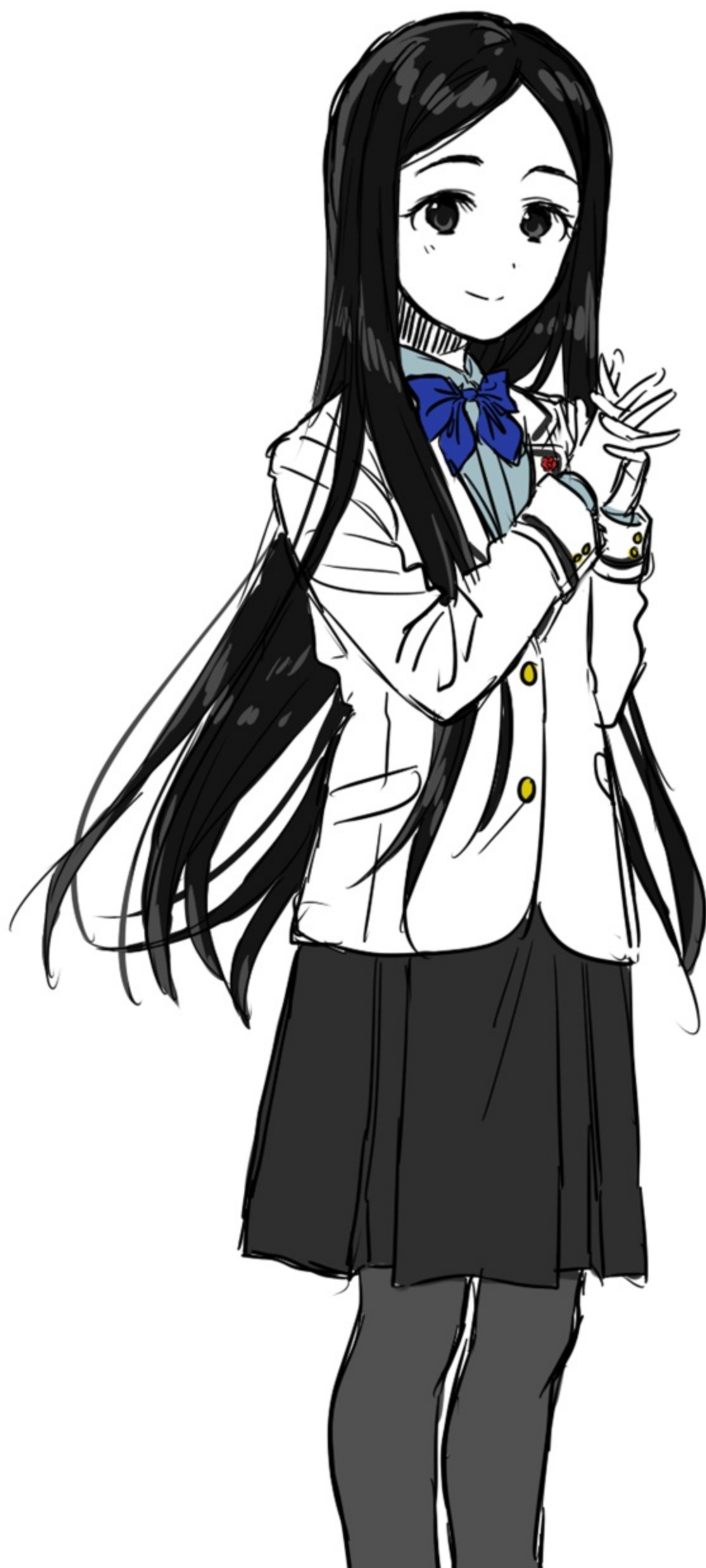
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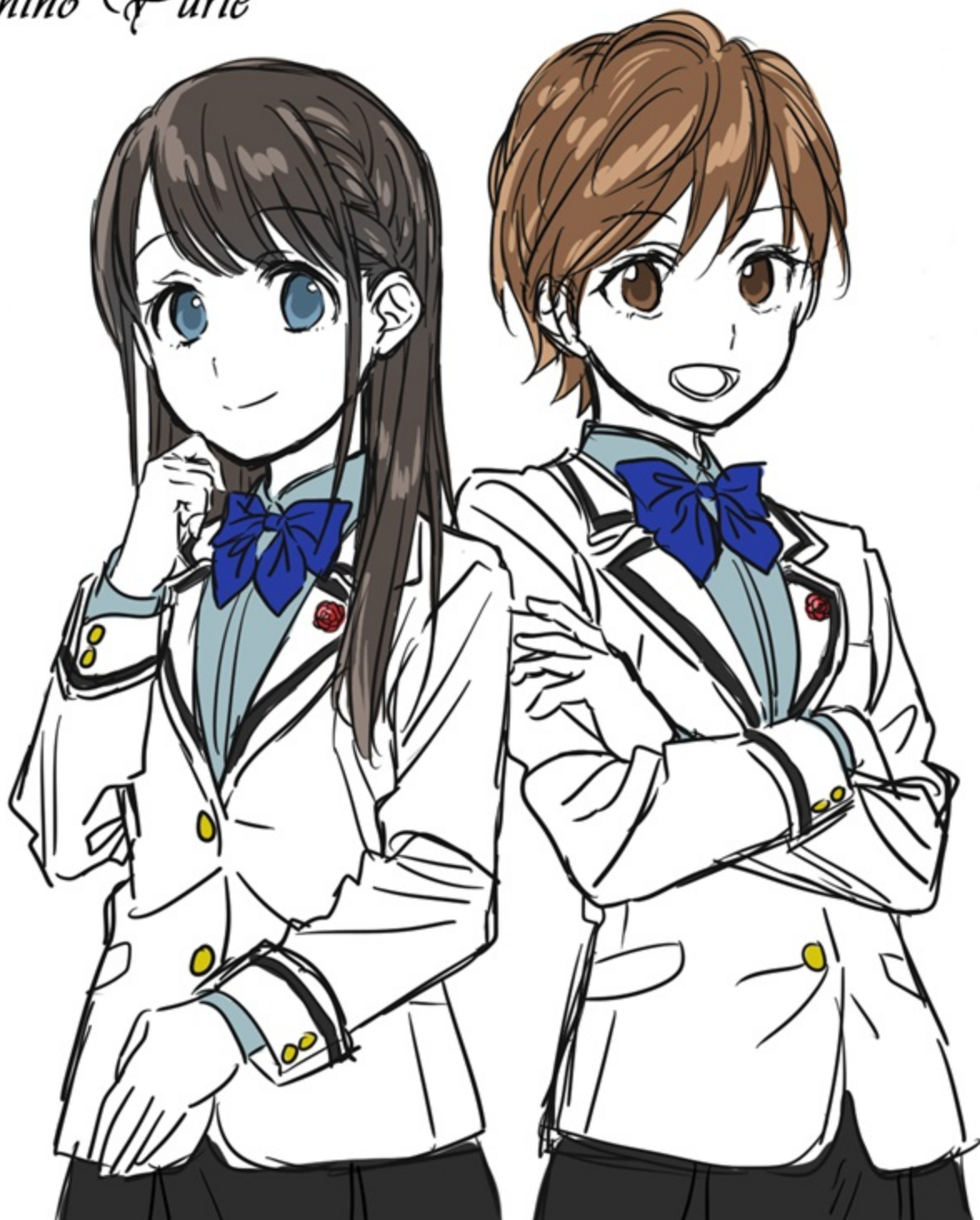


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CHAPTER 43

I've entered Suiran's middle school section.

The blazer jacket has changed from navy to white, and is quite a cute design. The wine coloured striped ribbon just accentuates that cuteness, and even though it's only been a month since I've entered, just changing the uniform makes me look like quite the onesan. How mysterious.

Now that we've entered middle school, 30% of our cohort is now new students who entered after taking an exam, the Externals.

And this new group of students managed to get into our school after rigorous examinations, so they're all really smart.

In general, Suiran students just ride the figurative escalator up from primary school, excluding special circumstances. Because of that, people sometimes talk about how the Internal Students are less bright than the Externals.

Once we enter high school, there are going to be even smarter kids coming in. In fact, by the time we're in high school, with the exception of a small group of students, it's the kids who have been here since primary that people take to be the dumbest.

But then usually the Internals themselves don't really mind, so I guess that's fine. They're at least not dumber than your normal kid after all.

From the staff's perspective though, it wouldn't be good for the traditional and prestigious Suiran to be seen as a den of idiots. That's why they gather smart kids from outside to make up for it.

Thanks to Suiran's brand power, as well as their splendid facilities and teaching content, we've got strong popularity, so it's not a problem gathering gifted students at all.

Particularly exceptional students are even taken as scholarship students, so they're exempted from school fees. And amongst them, those that perform above a certain level in the national mock exams are even given scholarship money that doesn't need

to be returned.

In other words, they're buying academic ranks with money in order to preserve the school's honour, right?

Kimidol's protagonist also entered Suiran as a scholarship student.

She entered Suiran because she didn't want to pay school fees. What's more, if she tried hard, she could even make money from the scholarship system there, which is why she wanted in. But when she entered, their sense of money value was just too different from hers, and she suffered quite a culture shock.

And well, yeah. Normally a school wouldn't do things on such a crazy scale.

I know how she felt because I experienced the same thing when I entered as a primary school student.

'What the hell is this!? This isn't how I remembered primary schools!' I thought with my mouth agape.

But she'll definitely get used to it, so three years from now, I hope the protagonist will give it her all.

The biggest difference between the primary section, and the middle-high sections is the existence of the Student Council.

The Student Council is a meritocratic organisation formed from good students.

In comparison, the Pivoine stresses lineage, pedigree, and assets more than individual power, and only people who can fulfil these and have been purebred Suiran students since primary are allowed in.

The Pivoine think of themselves as the true embodiment of Suiran, and because of that the Student Council are an arrogant and loathesome group of outsiders. On the other hand, the Pivoine's power doesn't come from their members as individuals, so the Student Council thinks of them as a harmful group that only knows how to abuse their power.

Although the traditionalist Pivoine and the meritocratic Student Council don't butt

heads on the surface, friction between them goes back a long time.

I don't know what kind of person the incumbent Student Council President is, but I hope they don't kick up a fuss while I'm here.

The middle and high school students belong to the same Pivoine. The Petite Pivoine in primary is in the end just an extra, and the middle-high section Pivoine is the real thing.

When I opened the door to the salon, I was met with furniture known for its beautiful curves, as well as flower arrangements of moth orchids and other spring flowers.



A flower arrangement of 胡蝶蘭(kochouran; lit. butterfly orchid), known as Phalaenopsis or moth orchids in English.

There was even a grand piano by the window.

I became particularly fond of this one-person sofa by the wall, with this cute art nouveau style lamp next to it, so I ended up sitting here most of the time I went to the salon.



How nice. This lamp is so cute. I want one for my room too.

Since the salon was shared by both middle and high school students, Yurie-sama was naturally there too. Emperor seemed incredibly happy, since it was the first time in years they had been enjoying school together.

He tried to hide it, but the corners of his mouth would curve up. He's pretty easy to understand.

Lately he hasn't been acting like a stalker either, and perhaps as a result of Yurie-sama's teachings, apparently he can think about others too now. I guess he matured as a human, huh~

As long as he's with his beloved Yurie-sama, Emperor is always in a good mood, so I'll probably be able to relax for another two years. Thank goodness.

"Reika-san, have you gotten used to the middle school section?"

Aira-sama came over to talk to me with some sweets in hand.

Today's was sachertorte, a type of chocolate cake with apricot jam.



Seeing the lustrous chocolate made me gulp.

"Yes. Being able to go to the school cafeteria instead of being given a school lunch was quite a fresh experience."

Once you enter middle school here, you can choose whether to go to the cafeteria or to bring lunch from home. The cafeteria seems like your normal fancy restaurant. Pretty much everything on the menu is over 2000 Yen. Quite expensive for your average student. It's delicious though.

I've actually got this secret goal of conquering every item on the menu, so for now I'm one of the kids that goes to the cafeteria.

And even in the cafeteria there are exclusive seats for the Pivoine. They're seated by the window in this well lit area.

Speaking of which, in Kimidol there was this one scene, wasn't there. The protagonist had no idea that it was Pivoine exclusive, and tried to sit down there, displeasing them. Yeah. Try your best, protagonist. Although, the one who was the most angry and shouted "A commoner would dare!? Know your place!" was actually Kisshouin Reika though.

"Are things going well with the External Students?"

"Well, there is still a wall between us, you could say."

"Well, I suppose there would be."

There are roughly ten External kids in each class. Unlike the scholarship students that will enter in the high school section, the Externals in middle school are still kids from families who can pay Suiran's expensive school fees. Because of that, there isn't too much of a difference in their sense for spending money.

That's why I think we'll all settle down after a while. Probably.

I'm still thinking about whether or not to enter a club. There isn't anything I really want to do after all.

Oniisama suggested that I enter the cooking club, but the activity days overlap with my lessons.

I also have my cram school and lessons with Karin-sensei as well. The first test since middle school is coming up soon, so I'm pretty busy at the moment.

Lately I've sort of been getting a lot of "as expected of Reika-sama" so I'm secretly struggling really hard not to let my true colours show.

Especially maths. Maths is suffering to me.

I remembered the word 'factorisation' but I'd completely forgotten what it entails. I just barely remembered that it has something to do with x and y . What the hell is going on with my memory.

Did I really learn this in my last life? I did, right? I mean, it's part of the compulsory curriculum.

Since I felt a huge crisis impending, I had Karin-sensei drill it into me.

I'd already decided to stop expecting anything academic from the past me. I should have already known as much after my experience in the primary school section...

But I just keep having these faint hopes.

There's no such thing as miracles though.

I guess I'll just keep trying my best from scratch...

CHAPTER 44

A Tenugui (手拭い) is a thin Japanese hand towel made of cotton. It is typically about 35 by 90 centimeters in size, plain woven and is almost always dyed with some pattern. It can be used for anything a towel could be used for – as a washcloth, dishcloth, but often as a headband, souvenir, decoration, or for wrapping items such as bottles. Towels made from terry cloth have largely replaced it in household use. However tenugui are still popular as souvenirs, decorations, and as a head covering in kendo, where it functions as a sweatband, as extra padding beneath the headgear (men), and to identify the participants by team color.

Nerima Daikon is one of Japan's main daikon radish breeds, named such because it was once cultivated in Nerima, Tokyo. Shougoin Daikon (聖護院大根) is one of the traditional daikon radishes of Kyoto.

Daikon-Ashi(lit. daikon legs) is the Japanese equivalent to 'thunder thighs', in reference to the shape of daikon radishes.

Aodakefumi is simply a piece of smooth, hard bamboo that is naturally and ideally cut and shaped to provide the bottom of your feet with an amazing massage, simply by gently stepping on it. Believed by some to encourage weight loss.

The cram school I'd been going to had been focused exclusively for primary school, so now that I'm in middle school I needed to find a new one.

For my middle school one as well, I picked one that Oniisama used to attend. I'm not with Akizawa-kun and Fukioka-san anymore, but Aoi-chan was with me instead!

Aoi-chan had been attending a primary school that was attached to higher-tiered schools. Because of that, even though it was a primary school attached to a bigger school the same way Suiran's primary school was, the system it used wasn't an escalator and unless you passed the entrance exams, they would mercilessly expel you. Thanks to that, Aoi-chan had bags under her eyes since New Year's.

Now that she's made it into the associated middle school without a problem, she's

been chatting with me about Tarow the Taro just like we used to. Apparently there's this new tenugui merchandise for him. Why a tenugui instead of a handkerchief or hand towel?

I'm still talking to Fukioka-san by email and phone calls. People with a sharp tongue like her are surprisingly rare, so I want us to stay friends.

Last time we talked we mentioned going somewhere together. It's so friends-like! But wouldn't it be better if she spent time with Akizawa-kun? Or so I thought, but it seems that Akizawa-kun is busy that day. Thought so~

Now that I'm a middle schooler, I'm allowed to walk outside by myself now. Only during the day though.

On weekdays I have classes, so I don't have much free time. But the fact that I have a few hours to wander about during the weekends now makes me pretty happy.

Now that I can just go to the convenience store to buy snacks, I don't need to use cram school as a cover anymore. If I bring a large bag with me to bring home snacks and sweets, I doubt Okaasama will find out.

Okaasama thinks beautiful skin is a girl's life, so she definitely wouldn't allow me to eat snacks with cheap oils in them.

And what's more, my next goal is eating fast food.

I really want some. It's the embodiment of junk food. Why do chips taste so good. And I definitely want ketchup with it.



Chips. Also known as french fries in certain other places in the Anglosphere.

Suiran has students coming from all over, so even if I head far away from home to buy snacks, there's still a chance I'll get spotted. Because of that, I still can't let my guard down.

Also, I want to eat at the food stands in festivals! Because festivals happen at night, it'll be hard for me to get permission, so at the moment it's nothing more than a dream. But festival yakisoba is yummy isn't it~



Yakisoba. Fried buckwheat, flavoured with a sauce that is more or less a mix of oyster sauce and thickened Worcestershire sauce.

Ah-, and I want to eat takoyaki as well.



Takoyaki. Typically batter filled with octopus, tempura scraps, pickled ginger, and green onion, topped with mayonnaise, thickened Worcestershire sauce, seaweed and bonito flakes.

Ikayaki grilled squid would be great too~



Ikayaki. Grilled squid on a stick, topped with soy sauce.

The number of dreams I have keeps increasing...

Even though I thought I'd be released from it after leaving primary, I ended up being nominated as vice rep again.

And my partner, the class rep, is Class Rep. He's in my class again. For some reason it feels like we're just the 'class rep' pair, but huh~ Unlike Class Rep, I'm not even a stereotype class-rep character.

Class Rep feels like he was born to be a class rep. Everybody calls him Class Rep like it's natural. What was his real name, anyway?

In May, we have the customary excursion. And it's mountain climbing.

Ugh. Mountain climbing. I really don't wanna go.

Apparently the idea behind it is to help the Internals and Externals bond through agonising physical activity, but rather than mountain climbing where everybody is too busy going 'hahh hahh wheeze wheeze' to even have a decent conversation, wouldn't it be better to have an outdoors cooking session or a barbeque at a camp site somewhere? At least I think we'd bond a lot better that way.

It's unfortunate, but I can't understand the appeal behind mountain climbing at all.

Apparently Class Rep actually quite likes mountain climbing. When I asked him what was fun about it, he listed the nature, the clean air, and the feeling of accomplishment for reaching the summit, but sorry. I still don't get it at all.

We're all a bunch of weak-limbed ojouamas who get chauffeured everywhere, so please don't make us do something as harsh as mountain climbing.

Speaking of which, for a while I used to do squats in primary school, but I ended up stopping at some point, didn't I. I still do my stretches before bed though.

You know, lately, I'm getting the feeling that my legs are getting fatter than they used to be. Well, compared to my last life they're still totally thin though.

In my last life, when I stopped growing taller in middle school, I started growing sideways instead, which was horrifying.

The ruder boys called me 'Nerima'. When I went to Kyoto, they called me 'Shougoin'. I cursed all of them to stop growing.

Even though there were plenty of girls with thicker legs than mine! Even though my weight was average! Even though my legs weren't fat, they were just a little swollen! Why are middle school boys so insensitive. Cause they're idiots I suppose. It's definitely because they're idiots, yep.

I also cursed them to be unpopular. *This* cursed worked quite well, kekeke!

I also tried a diet to make my legs skinnier, but they sure didn't work at all. Tsk. All these unpleasant memories are surfacing.

I think I'll buy an aodakefumi the next time I have a break.

During the mountain climbing, my group fell behind. Class Rep, I'll leave the rest to you. I'm struggling just taking care of myself here. My lungs are making a weird noise. I'm suffering. I have to keep watching my feet so that I don't fall, so I can't look at the scenery at all. Just what the heck is fun about this.

Whenever I look behind me, here and there I spot other kids on the verge of death. ...Thank goodness, I'm not the only one.

When I finally made it up to the mountain somehow, kids who arrived way earlier were already eating their lunches.

Oi! Weren't we supposed to be deepening our bonds today.

I was so tired that I couldn't even find the energy to eat. Us weaker kids are all hunched over, exhausted.

While I was sitting there, I could hear the girls around Kaburagi and Enjou happily kicking up a fuss.

Even though my group hasn't even opened our lunch boxes yet, those guys are already done eating.

There's this somewhat gyaru-group that's been forming since we entered middle school that's for some reason full of athletic girls. I'm jealous.

After resting for a while, just as I regained the energy needed to eat, I saw some of the External boys chatting amicably with some Internal girls.

Goodness! While we were here dying, some of the Externals and Internals got closer together! Could it be that the mountain climbing worked!?

Nothing so wonderful happened for me. Is it because I look weird sporting drill hair with a tracksuit?

Oh? Isn't that Miharu-chan over there?

Miharu-chan is the vice class rep for another class. She also fits the image of a class rep to a tee.

Anyway, there she was, chatting with an External boy. Ah! She laughed.

I wonder if Class Rep felt jealous seeing that. Even at normal times, he's already so panicked about Enjou being in her class.

Before long, he's going to come for more advice, I bet.

Aahh... When it's time to leave the mountain, I wonder if it's possible to have the Kisshouin family send me a helicopter.

CHAPTER 45

Right after the excursion was the mid-semester exam.

I studied for my life.

I found out from Aoi-chan that the amount people study in prep-schools was even more than I imagined, so I gave it my all.

Whenever there was something I didn't understand in the middle of the night, I would invade Oniisama's room to ask.

Because I was studying so desperately, my family started to worry.

But I can't let my 'As expected of Reika-sama' reputation go to waste after all this time, you know~!

After cramming as much as I could, I faced the mid-sems.

The moment that the two-day examinations finished, I could feel the vocabulary and formulas spilling out of my head.

I can't study any more. I'm burnt out...

Today is the day that the exam results are posted.

While pretending that I didn't care at all about rankings, I went to have a look with my friends.

My heart was pounding hard.

God, O God, please give me results for my efforts! Please have pity on me!

I desperately ran my eyes over the names.

.....

Ah-. It's there.

18th – Kisshouin Reika

“Goodness! You’re amazing, Reika-sama!”

“18th place, Reika-sama!”

“Congratulations, Reika-sama!”

18th place.

The girls around me started clapping and congratulating me.

...I did it.

I really did it!

It was worth it! I studied so hard that I had nightmares about it, but it was worth it!

“Thank you.”

Despite myself, a relieved sigh escaped my lips.

But I definitely can’t let them know how much I studied.

I don’t want to be labelled a swot.

Hahhh. Looks like I’ve somehow managed to defend my ‘as expected of Reika-sama’ position. Thank goodness.

18th place out of 200 people. I tried pretty hard, didn’t I.

Aahh, really, thank goodness.

Everyone started squealing ‘*Kyaaa!*’ all of a sudden.

“Look! Kaburagi-sama and Enjou-sama!”

1st – Kaburagi Masaya

2nd – Enjou Shuusuke

“To be able to hold back the External Students and take 1st and 2nd place! As expected of them!”

“They really can do anything~!”

...Truly~!

The girls are in a trance again.

Unlike me, those two didn't seem to have studied much either. Is this just the difference in talent?

Normally in the first middle school test, the top ranks are the External Students who passed through examination hell just to get in here.

Geez, as expected, I suppose.

In the end, a faker like me can't compare.

I didn't know any of the names 3rd place and below, so I guess most of them were Externals.

Ah-! I found a name I *do* know.

Hm~mm...

I looked here and there for the person I wanted, but couldn't find anything in the sea of black hair.

Well, I guess there's no way he has silver hair *now*. If he did, there's no way he'd pass the interviews to get in here.

...Well, whatever.

Today I'm going to Fukioka-san's house.

It might be the first time I'm going to a friend's house to play. I'm so happy!

Fukioka-san is an Ojousama that goes to an ojousama school, so even when I asked Okaasama for permission, there wasn't any problem.

I don't think it's good to discriminate friends based on class, but...

Since it was my first time visiting, Okaasama gave me a present to bring. It's cookies from a western confectionary store that even needs an introductory from a regular customer to buy from. A standard present for the Kisshouin family.

After I greeted Fukioka-san's mother, she led me to Fukioka-san's room.

"Could you sit on that sofa please?"

"Yees."

Her room was girly and cute.

I did as asked, and sat down on the cute, flower-patterned sofa.

"It's been a while, huh. Have you been well?"

"I have. Haven't we already gone through this by email and phone?"

Fukioka-san started giggling.

Even though it's only been a few months, now that Fukioka-san is a middle schooler, she somehow seems more mature than before~

"By the way, I heard from Takumi. Apparently you did very well on your exams. Congratulations."

"Thanks. But it was just a fluke, you know?"

He even tells her about *that*?

Also, Fukioka-san showed me earlier through the window. Akizawa-kun's house is diagonal from here. They really are neighbours.

Apparently he's busy with Track and Field Club today.

"Fukioka-san, have you entered a club?"

"I've been considering maybe the Koto Club or the Wind Instrument Club, but I'm not sure.



The Koto instrument.

What about you?"

"In the end, I haven't entered one either. There isn't anything I really want to do, and I'm pretty busy after school."

"Truee. I have violin practice too."

The two of us nodded in agreement.

"But aren't you a member of that whatever club at Suiran? I forget the name though."

"Ahh, you mean the Pivoine."

“Yes, that one. It’s a club that only chosen people can enter, right? People talk about it a lot at my school too.”

“Eh-, why?”

“Because it’s filled with people who are powerful, even amongst Suiran right? Yurinomiya is a girls school. We pay quite a lot of attention to good men from other schools.”

“Hm~mm.”

She mentioned the names of a few boys from grades above me, but they were all people I didn’t know. That’s pretty amazing...

“And as you’d expect, amongst them, the Two Tops in our cohort are by far the most popular.”

“Ahhh...”

I don’t even need to ask for their names.

“The young master of the Kaburagi family is called the Emperor right? There are people in my school that call him Emperor as well, you know.”

“EEHH-!? Could it be that the origin of that name is...”

“Yes. As I recall, Takumi told me that it started after the Athletics Meet.”

Uwahh, this is bad.

Even people from other schools knows about the Cavalry Emperor name. Does the guy himself know that?

I'm starting to sympathise a little...

"What's wrong?"

"Ahhh, welll, I was just wondering whether it's okay that his Emperor nickname comes from a children's cavalry battle."

"My. Is that so? Anything is allowed as long as they're a hot guy, you know. Who cares where the nickname came from."

"Is that how is it?"

"That's how it is. The girls at my school are all happily saying stuff like *"The Emperor" is such a dreamy name'* you know."

"Ohh?"

So that's how it is?

Well, it's true that back when I read Kimidol, I did say something like *'Emperor, what a cool name!'* without really caring how it came about.

"By the way, about the way you've been addressing me."

"Yes?"

"You don't need to call me Fukioka-san. Just Sakurako will do, you know."

After saying that, she turned away in a pout.

OOHHH! FUKIOKA-SAN IS GOING DERE ON ME!

“Ummmm, then, let’s go with ‘Sakura-chan’.”

“...Fine.”

Geez, your lips are always so proud, Sakura-chan you tsundere.

“But if I’m not calling you Fukioka-san, then you have to call me Reika!”

“I see. Then let’s go with Reika-san.”

EHHHH! If I’m calling you ‘-chan’, wouldn’t it be normal to call me ‘-chan’ back!? I want my friends to call me something casual too.

Maybe she could tell that I was sulky, because after a sigh, she said,

“Fine then, Reika.”

WHA-!? Suddenly jumping over the ‘-chan’ altogether and just using my bare name!?

At Sakura-chan’s house, we quickly became closer friends.

CHAPTER 46

After school as I was walking to the Pivoine salon, I spotted Kaburagi and Enjou up ahead with a gaggle of girls.

Kaburagi used to outright ignore them, but recently he's been replying at least. Some incredibly vague replies though.

He really has matured, hasn't he.

But unlike his overbearing self, his manga equivalent was just strong of will, so I wonder how close he'll get to his manga version in these next three years.

The two of them reached the entrance, and then headed into the salon without hesitation.

Because the salon is forbidden to anybody who isn't a member, the girls around them were forced to stop before the door.

They stayed there looking reluctant for a while, but giving up, they turned to head back down the hallway and noticed me coming from behind.

I'm not close to these girls, so I was going to just pass by them and head into the salon.

Ah. I'm being glared at.

One of the girls was definitely glaring at me as I passed.

I'm surprised.

I may be saying this myself, but as a Pivoine member, I'm shocked that there's a girl who would so daringly glare at me.

The Pivoine is a privileged class here at school, so there aren't many people who would pick a fight from up front. I suppose just the Student Council, really.

My group and this girl's group haven't been getting along for a while now, but does this mean they're finally declaring war on us?

Hmmm... I've definitely never thought of getting close to flashy girls like that, but I

don't like troublesome stuff eitherrr.

While I was spacing out in the salon and thinking about the earlier events over some tea, Aira-sama and Yurie-sama called out to me.

"You had some fantastic results for the earlier test didn't you, Reika-san. Congratulations."

"It looks like you've been trying hard for your English classes too, Reika-chan."

Uwaih, the Princess and the Knight appeared together. So dazzling-!

"Thank you very much. But it was merely a fluke."

I'm very glad that I'm close to Aira-sama, but unfortunately I'm not as close to Yurie-sama.

And that's completely because of the idiot that's always next to her...

"Yurie."

Geh-! He appeared.

As expected, Kaburagi appeared right behind Yurie-sama.

And Enjou too.

I look up to Yurie-sama and definitely wanna get closer to her, but because Kaburagi is always close-by, I keep my distance.

Even just now he ruined a perfectly good chance!

Apparently she could somewhat tell that I was bad with Kaburagi because Aira-sama gave me a worried look.

I feel bad for making her worry about me.

I'd better take a harmless and inoffensive stance here...

"Ah, that reminds me. Reika-sama, it must have been dreadful experiencing that deer attack. The photos gave me a shock. You must have been terrified."

...Yurie-sama, why are you bringing that up now.

A certain Mr. Eternally Unrequited Love is desperately stifling his laughter next to you, but...?

"...Yes, well. I was not injured, so it is no matter."

Just how long is this idiot going to laugh for.

Urghhhh, I'll get him for this!

"Speaking of which, I heard from a friend of mine, but apparently the name 'Emperor' is well known even at Yurinomiya."

The shock showed on his face.

KE KE KE!

"Goodness. It looks like it'll be impossible to extinguish the flames now, Masaya."

Yurie-sama laughed in amusement.

"...That's fine. I've already given up anyway."

Kaburagi sighed.

Oh ho?

“It’s not like I came up with the name on my own after all. Also, I guess this is still better than being straight-out called ‘Napoleon’...”

He looked incredibly fed up with it.

“That’s true. If I walked around town and somebody called out ‘Ah! It’s Napoleon!’ I don’t think I’d ever live down the shame after all. But you being called ‘Emperor’ in the middle of town is pretty bad too, huh. If I was with you at the time, I might even back away and pretend not to know you.”

“Shuusuke, you bastard...”

Kaburagi glared so hard it was like he was trying to shoot Enjou down with laser beams, but Enjou just laughed it off without a care.

“Who knows how long Masaya is going to be called Emperor. Since nobody is calling you Deer Girl, aren’t you much better off, Reika-san?”

That doesn’t console me at all.

Or rather, I bet you aren’t even trying. Your eyes are laughing after all.

What ‘Deer Girl’. That’s even worse than ‘Drill Hair’ isn’t it. If somebody called me that, I’d cry, you know.

“One day I’ll give you a dumb nickname too,” exclaimed Kaburagi in frustration.

A line like that isn’t going to scare him at all, Kaburagi.

Look, Enjou is laughing even harder now.

Aahh, but I also wanna find out Enjou’s weak point.

I want to find it, and then rub salt all over it.

It’s unfair that he’s the only one that can be calm like this.

What 'Deer Girl'.

As I was seething inside, my eyes met with Kaburagi.

After staring at me for a while, Kaburagi gave a small shake of his head.

Mn? What was that just now?

Why did he look at me like some pitiful disappointment?

I'll let you know, but in terms of 'disappointment level', right now you're basically my level, okay!

"Speaking of which, Okishima-senpai and the Student Council President were going at it again."

"Goodness, what was it this time?"

"Who knows. Those two *always go at it, after all."

I was relieved that the conversation moved away from deers, but more importantly,

"Is the Pivoine on such bad terms with the Student Council?"

Okishima-senpai is the former President of the Pivoine.

If somebody like that often argues with the StuCo, it might be really serious.

"No, it isn't like that. Of course we aren't on good terms, but those two are special. They've always been on bad terms, on a personal level. After they became the Pivoine and StuCo Presidents respectively, they've butted heads in their positions quite a bit. I suppose how the Pivoine and Student Council interact depends quite a bit on whether the presidents are aggressive or moderate that year."

Hmmm...

I haven't heard of the middle school section's Student Council getting into fights with the Pivoine, so I've never really paid it much mind.

Are the high schoolers this year just particularly belligerent? Must be rough.

"But you know? The current Student Council President is trying his best to improve the school, so he isn't a bad person, you know? As long as you spend your time normally, he won't really say anything about you. Once I met him by coincidence in the music room, and he opened the door to let me go first. Just because the presidents are like cats and dogs, doesn't mean that they'll extend that attitude towards us."

Isn't that just because Yurie-sama is beautiful?

The eyebrows on Mr. Eternally Unrequited Love have been twitching, you know?

"It would be terrible if Okishima heard you just now."

Mmmn?

Could it be that Okishima-Kaichou is aiming for Yurie-sama!?

Oohh, Mr. E.U.P.'s mouth has turned into an 〽.

But still, the Student Council huhh. I wonder what kind of people they are.

I'm a little curious now.

And hey, me, what the heck are you getting all familiar with Kaburagi for...

CHAPTER 47

Some foods to introduce first:



Takikomigohan is a Japanese rice dish seasoned with dashi and soy sauce along with mushrooms, vegetables, meat, or fish.



Nikujaga. A Japanese dish of meat, potatoes and onion stewed in sweetened soy sauce.



Oden is a Japanese winter dish consisting of several ingredients such as boiled eggs, daikon, konjac, and processed fishcakes stewed in a light, soy-flavoured dashi broth.



Hamburg steak is beefsteak that is shaped into a patty to be cooked after being chopped. It is closely similar to the Salisbury steak.



Chawanmushi. A savoury egg custard meal. The custard consists of an egg mixture flavored with soy sauce, dashi, and mirin, with numerous ingredients such as shiitake mushrooms, kamaboko, yuri-ne (lily root), ginkgo and boiled shrimp placed into a tea-cup-like container.

Unfortunately this chapter isn't really about food, but these do get mentioned, so I thought I would mention anyway.

Now that I'm a middle schooler I can walk about on my own, and there's a place that I've always wanted to go to.

The home that I lived in, in my old life.

The world that I live in now is almost exactly the same as my old world. Even the landmarks and station names and addresses are the same.

But there are some parts that are different. Naturally Suiran Academy is the first difference, and then there are the families, societies, and people that appear in Kimidol.

Only, aside from these, it really is just like the place that I knew. In that case, just maybe, the home that I lived in, and my family, might be here.

I've always, always thought it.

That perhaps, just maybe, I could meet them.

The place I used to live with my family was a town just outside of Tokyo.

Together with my parents and younger sister, the four of us lived there in an apartment.

Dad was a normal salaryman. After getting out of the bath, he would wander about in his underwear and get booed by the rest of us. A dad who was just a tad hopeless at home.

Mum was a housewife, and she was good at cooking. Whenever I came back from a school trip or camp, she would always make the dishes I liked. Takikomigohan, nikujaga and oden. When it came to my sister, it was hamburg steak with ketchup, chawanmushi, and miso soup with nameko mushrooms and tofu.

So I would come back home in the first time in days, and opening the door I would smell the foods that I loved. I'd feel relieved at coming home.

What was it that she made when Dad came back from business trips? Aahh, it was always beer and the like. He'd say that beer was really something, and happily drink it.

In my old life I would always laze about at home, and Mum would get angry because of it.

Why was it that when people tell you to go study before you get to it, you lose all motivation?

When I wasn't around she would clean up my room without permission, and we'd even fight about it. Even if they were meaningless to Mum, they were important to *me*, so how could she just throw them out, I would argue.

My little sister was a shrewd one.

She was smart enough to run away when she saw me getting yelled at.

Whenever adults told me to bear with it because I was the older one, or give things to her because I was the older one, I would always wonder *why* in frustration. Sometimes I hated her a little.

But on nights that we saw scary things on television, we would sleep in the same futon together. And when we went to the toilet, we would hold hands, and then wait outside singing songs to calm each other down.

For my coming-of-age ceremony, she gave me a bag and zori that she bought with money from her part-time job. With a laugh she told me to pay her back when it was her turn.

Dad was always lazing around on the couch. He was like a beached seal, really. Mum would tell me that I was like him.

But on weekends, even if it was just close-by, he would drive us places. We went to the ocean or the mountains to play. The road safety amulet charm that I bought on a trip would hang from the mirror of his car.

I arrived at the station of my old town.

The front of the station seemed the way I remembered it. The large supermarket, and a few other little things were changed, but it was still a nostalgic view.

The distance to my home was ten minutes by foot. After leaving the main street and entering the residential zone, it was on the 7th floor of an apartment complex.

Just a little further. Just a little further. After turning this corner——

It wasn't there.

In place of the familiar brick apartment complex, was an old, beige building.

Neither the home that I lived in, or the family that I lived with, had been there.

I had the family car pick me up.

The first train ride in a while had been nerve-wracking. Having a car take me to and from is a lot easier.

Once I get used to this, I really can't return to being a commoner.

Because this lifestyle is going to continue anyway. It can't be helped.

When I came home, Oniisama was there for once.

He's been busy ever since he entered university, and lately I don't even see him at dinner.

Because Oniisama was relaxing on the living room sofa, I sat down by his side and clung to him.

"Mn? What's wrong, Reika?"

Nothing really. I just wanted to cling to you.

Please don't mind me, and continue reading your book.

I rubbed my head into his arm.

And he sat there, silently accepting me.

When I was there——

I knew it, I thought.

I knew that this was the world of a manga, so of course they wouldn't be there.

But I had hoped.

If I could see them, once more...

I wanted to tell them that I loved them.

I should have had Mum teach me how to cook. I won't be able to taste her food again.
I never helped her do anything after all. This is my punishment.

I should have gone to watch baseball with Dad. Instead I wasn't interested, so I just stayed in my room to read manga. Since I was just his seal daughter anyway, I should have at least lazed about in the living room with him.

I should have been kinder to my sister. When she used my accessories without permission, I seriously grabbed her and fought. I was the older sister, so I should have just let her.

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm sorry for being useless.

I want to see you.

Just once more, I want to see you.

I'm so lonely.

I've always, always been lonely.

Dad. Mum. Yuka-chan...

Apparently I had drifted off before I knew it.

I'd been laying on the couch with a blanket on me.

Was it Oniisama who covered it over me?

There wasn't anybody in the living room right now.

It's the Kisshouin house.

I'm Kisshouin Reika.

My family right now is Otousama, Okaasama, and Oniisama.

This time I'll treasure them.
I'll definitely protect them.
That's what I've decided.

"Oh? You're up, Reika?"

Oniisama came back into the living room.

"Ehehe."

So I jumped at him.

CHAPTER 48

It was our job to get a list of names and club affiliations in order to bring to the Student Council.

We had our classmates fill out the forms, but just when I was about to head to the Student Council room to deliver it, Class Pres suddenly suggested,

“Why don’t I go alone?”

“Why ever would you do that?”

“Eh-, I mean, look, people say that the Pivoine and Student Council don’t really get along... And you *are* technically a Pivoine member.”

What is ‘technically’ supposed to mean? How rude.

“There is no issue. More importantly, it was implied that this task is to be taken as a way to introduce ourselves to the Student Council, and I shall thus be accompanying you. We will be leaving right after, at any rate.”

“I’m fine if you are, but...”

“Then let us tarry no longer. The sooner we complete this task, the sooner we can head home.”

After waving the papers in my hand to urge Class Rep to hurry, we headed to the StuCo together.

It’s my first time coming here.

There aren't any 1st years in the Student Council, so we're rarely familiar with them at all.

After knocking on the door and stating our purpose, we were given permission to enter.

"Please excuse me."

Inside the room were desks, shelves and lockers, as well as a sofa and table in the middle. Quite a simple room compared to the Pivoine salon.

But well, if you use the Pivoine as your standard, then most everything in the world would feel simple.

The room had a really meritocratic feel. Even so, being a room in Suiran, the furnishings were of high quality.

After the two of us introduced ourselves, we stated our purpose once more.

"Ah, the club registrar. It goes in the box over there."

I followed the senpai's instructions and placed it in the box.

...Well that was quick.

Just as I was about to excuse myself, the door suddenly opened with a bang.

"Oi! I'm back with food, so let's eat! To be honest I nicked it from the Pivoine though!"

My heart skipped a beat.

"President! This *girl* is a Pivoine!"

"Eh-"

The newcomer's eyes focused on me.

A powerful and piercing gaze, a daring smile, and a presence like the sun.
The moment I saw him, it felt like a grand orchestra played in my mind.
A throbbing melody in my heart.
This person is almost like Orff's *O Fortuna*!

"Why is there a Pivoine girl here?"

What do I do? I can't look away.
My heart is pounding. What do I do, it's pounding!

"Oooi."

Oh no! I think I might have fallen in love!

After that, I somehow managed to pull myself together and smooth things over.
Thankfully, the upperclassmen in the room had conveniently taken my pause to be shock from "*I nicked it from the Pivoine*".
The President simply said, "Geez. Let's keep this a secret from the rest of the Pivoine, okay?" with a dazzling smile.
I swore in my heart that I would die before I talked.

The person who made the dramatic entrance against the backdrop of *O Fortuna*, turned out to be a third year in middle school, Student Council President Tomoe Senju-senpai.
That's all I know for now.
But even that much is plenty.
Since then, Senpai's theme song has been playing endlessly in my head.
Uu-, my heart hurts each time I think of Senju-senpai's face!

But that smile was so cool...

"Let's keep this a secret from the rest of the Pivoine, okay?"

UHYAAAAAAAAAAAA~!!

I rolled around and around in bed.

By the time I got up, I was completely dizzy.

But still, what do I do from now on?

We're in different grades. I'm not even a StuCo member so I have no point of contact. And what's more, he's the President of the organisation that's been at odds with the Pivoine for years.

There's no chance of getting close at all.

If only Senpai wasn't the StuCo President at least!

Mn?

...Isn't this kind of, Romeo and Juliet-ish?

UKYAAAAAA~!! If Senju-senpai is Romeo, then that makes me Juliet!

Romeo, doff thy name!

...Let's calm down.

I'm part of the Pivoine, so I can't enter the Student Council. To begin with, he'd have graduated middle school by the time I entered. There's no point in doing it.

...Senpai is graduating. Romeo-senpai is graduating! Romeo-senpai is...!

...Calm down, me.

To begin with, let's have him remember my name and face.

Ah-, today he went to get food, so maybe he gets hungry after school.

What if I made him handmade cookies?

"It's delicious. You're talented as expected, Juliet."

"Oh goodness, Romeo-senpai..."

If I got told something like that, what would I do!? *What!?*

Okay! Cookies it is!

All that's left is...

I pulled out a new rubber from my drawers.

Um, you know, it's not like I actually really believe in this stuff, you know?

But I mean, like, when I was a middle schooler in my past life, for a while I was really into this.

It's just this charm that goes, "If you write the name of your beloved on a new rubber, as long as nobody else touches it before it runs out, your love will be requited".

Like, I *reallyyy* don't actually believe it, you know? But like, I mean, I may as well, so I'm just going to try a bit. You know?

I pulled off the case, and wrote in small red letters,

"Tomoe Senju"

Putting the case back on, I prayed to Rubber-sama.

Please, God! Grant me a chance!

Using my head makes me hungry. It's already time for dinner.

Lately Oniisama has been coming home early. Today he was home in time to eat dinner with us.

Eating together with family really *does* make things yummier.

Aahh, but my heart is so full that I might not be able to eat...

I'm being tormented by an affliction of the heart.

Oh my! Beef cheek simmered in red wine is my favourite!

Each time our eyes meet, Oniisama smiles at me kindly.

Hmmm.

If Romeo-senpai's character theme is Orff's *O Fortuna*, then Oniisama's character theme is Ravel's *Bolero* I guess.

Then Aira-sama's is Liszt's *La Campanella* while Yurie-sama's is Schubert's *Ave Maria*. Enjou is Satie's *Gnossiennes*, while Imari-sama is... Hm, maybe *In a Persian Market*.

Which means Kaburagi is Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain*.

A few days later, Mr. In a Persian Market, Imari-sama, came over to play, so I secretly went to consult him.

"Eh-! Reika-chan, there's a guy you like!?"

"Please remember to keep this a secret from Oniisama."

"...Ahhh, yeah."

Without telling him exactly who it was, I asked him for a way to get closer.

Unfortunately I didn't get any good advice from him.

But he did tell me that handmade cookies were a bit intense to get from somebody you barely knew, so I followed his advice and stopped it.

It's true that handmade Valentines chocolates aren't really favoured at Suiran, so maybe cookies get the same treatment.

But geez. I even went out of the way to practice. Tsk.

Ah-, but since falling in love, I've been having fun every day!

CHAPTER 49

KISSHOIN TAKATERU

My sister has been acting weird.

The other day she went out somewhere, but the moment she came home she stuck to me.

My sister always fawns on me, but that night was different.

Because she'd been clinging to my arm with her face buried, I couldn't see her expression. Still, I could tell that she was down.

After a while, my clothes felt cold.

She was crying.

I wanted to find out what happened exactly, but my sister can be surprisingly stubborn.

So I pretended that I didn't notice, and just lent her my arm.

I'd been busier lately, so I didn't get home as early. Because of that, we had less time together.

Even though it was something sad enough to cry about, my sister wouldn't speak.

Maybe she'd been lonely.

So I decided at that moment that it might be better to make the time to come home a little earlier.

My arm started feeling heavier, and when I turned to look, I found that she had cried herself to sleep.

I would have felt bad waking her up, so I went to get a blanket for her, but when I draped it over, her stomach grumbled. She was chewing in her sleep too.

...Apparently she was hungry.

So I went to prepare food, so that she could eat the moment she woke.

Since that day, for some reason my sister has been really lecturing our father. She casually whispers things in his ears like, “The Heavens see through all” or “Bad news travels quickly” or “Heaven knows, Earth knows, you know and I know”. Well, to be honest, my sister has always treated him like this, and she’ll say stuff like this on occasion, like she suddenly remembers to. But its frequency has been increasing. Even though she says “Otousama. I believe in you, Otousama.” with a serious expression, it seems like she doesn’t at all. And being a father who isn’t trusted at all by his daughter, naturally he feels down. She even came up to me and said, “You’re the only one I can rely on, Oniisama. Please rehabilitate Otousama for me.”

Little Sister... Our father is right behind you...

Apparently in my sister’s mind, our father is an unbelievable villain. I heard him mutter “I wonder if it’s her rebellious phase...” ...How pitiful.

But lately, her weird behaviour has taken another strange turn.

She sighs a whole lot, and will suddenly grasp at her chest in pain. *A disease!? A spasm!?* Or so I thought as I ran over in panic, but she just said something weird like “This is a maiden’s affliction.” I was still worried about whether it actually was some disease, but at dinner she was eating happily as usual, so I figured that she was alright. As for my father, in order to raise her opinion of him, lately he’s been diligently buying all sorts of rare pastries and cakes and fruits for her. And she’s been dilligently eating them all.

Well, I'm glad that she's healthy.

This one time, she whole-heartedly plucked petals. She would pluck at them, and sigh, then pluck at them and sigh again.

Only after a number of flowers were left bald did she stop, after one final, big sigh.

Then after that, she silently cleaned up the pitiful remains of the flowers.

Had she simply been really stressed?

Most recently, it happened while my sister was doing homework. One of her answers were wrong, so to rub it out, I picked up the rubber from her pencil case. And then she screamed "AAAAHHH!" like it was the end of the world.

After snatching it in panic from my hand, my sister dropped her shoulders in gloom.

Just what was going on with that rubber?

"Oniisama, you're too much..."

After leaving behind those mysterious words, my sister picked up all her things and left my room.

What the?

And Little Sister, are you fine with leaving that answer wrong?

"Wasn't that flower fortune telling?"

I spoke to my friend Imari about her.

She consulted him about something quite passionately, when he came over to play the other day.

Even when I asked her what it was about, she just replied "Nothing at all", and wouldn't

reply to me.

...No fun at all.

“Flower fortune telling?”

“What, you’ve never heard of it? It’s pretty common, isn’t it? That thing where they go, *‘He loves me. He loves me not.’* as they pick at petals and stuff. Don’t you remember the girls doing it, back when we were kids?”

“Aahh, I think I did hear something like that.”

Flower fortune telling, huh.

Seeing my sister rend petals with ghastly vigour, that kind of maidenly idea never came to mind.

Rather, I had wondered if she had some sort of grudge against them.

But flower fortune telling, huh.

Wasn’t that a love fortune?

Love?

“...Imari. What did my sister talk to you about?”

“Eehh, well, nothing big...”

“Imari.”

“Ehh~ I mean, I already made a promise with Imouto-chan, so...”

“Imari.”

“Come on, Takateru, even you have heaps of stuff your sister doesn’t know, right? GUHOH-!”

Silence, fool.

As warning, I gave him a second punch.

Even though he started coughing and spluttering, he still wouldn’t talk.

I sighed.

“Professor Kumesuke’s wife. At the Academic Meeting”

“UGEH-! How did you know about that-!?”

“What did my sister talk to you about?”

“...It’s what you suspect.”

Hm.

“Who is it?”

“I don’t know. I tried asking, but she wouldn’t tell me. Ah-, but she did say something about Romeo.”

“Romeo?”

Are we still talking about a real person here?

Could it be that my sister has an imaginary boyfriend? Considering who we’re talking about, it’s certainly possible.

Perhaps my sister has a foreign boyfriend that only she can see.

“Also she started talking about giving handmade cookies as a present, so I told her it would better not to.”

“Cookies?”

Ah-! I remember!

Just a while ago, my sister made my father and I eat cookies.

Because of my mother’s diet, she doesn’t eat sweet things at night.

The cookies were burnt bitter here and there, but the rest of them were sweet, so perhaps you could say that my sister’s cooking was slowly approaching the average person’s.

The cookies on my father’s plate were far more burnt than mine.

He asked, “Oh, were these choc chip cookies?” causing my sister to grow sullen.

Dad, those cookies might be pitch black, but there’s no chocolate in them at all. They’re plain cookies.

My father wordlessly washed them down with his tea.

“So it was *that* huh.”

“Oh! Do you know something?”

“I guess.”

In order to give cookies to the person you like, you used me as a lab rat, huh.

Burnt foods are bad for you, you know.

Know our father’s grief.

“Well? What are you going to do?”

“Nothing at all, of course.”

“Oh? I thought you’d try and stop it.”

“As if.”

Well, I will check to see that he isn’t a weirdo though.

If somebody was tricking a lady of the Kisshouin house, and planning to do bad things to her, I’d be troubled.

As long as that isn’t the case, I’m fine with anything.

“After all...”

I can’t even imagine that absurd little sister actually succeeding in her romance.

To begin with, I’m not even sure he’s real.

Hmm, she mentioned before that she wanted to see the zoo in Hokkaido. Once it’s done, I’ll take her there.

But Little Sister, if you really have fallen in love, maybe you should hold back on our father’s tributes.

After all, your face is getting a little round.

CHAPTER 50

I've been over the moon since falling for Romeo-senpai.

So over the moon that I can't do a thing about it. Awake, asleep, my mind is always filled with Romeo-senpai.

I've been doing things like checking his class schedule to see if I ever have a chance to pass by him, or staring hard out the window to see him during P.E. class.

Even when I get home, before I know it I'm thinking about Romeo-senpai, and end up picking at flower petals.

My the results of my *urara* flower divinations was unfavourable. But using the flower with my name, I'll break through with guts and willpower!

Anyhow, as I was spending my days like that, my ranking fell on the end-of-term tests. Hard.

Of course it did. I pretty much never studied, after all. I was too busy being happy. And honestly, even I didn't think I would fall this badly.

When I realised my name wasn't on the published list, the girls around me said stuff like "What a shame~" but I thought that I'd fallen only 2 or 3 places at most.

But when I looked at my slip, I had fallen over thirty ranks.

This is a critical moment. Critical like trying to keep my balance on the point of a cliff.

"As expected of Reika-sama" is in the past now. It was incredibly short-lived.

Honestly, these marks are just horrible...

Or so I was thinking to myself, depressed, when my homeroom teacher suddenly called for me. And to the student counselling room, no less.

I've got a terrible, terrible feeling about this.

I wondered what she was going to say as I headed there in depression. When I arrived, my homeroom teacher asked me for my thoughts on my term-end results.

Well, even if they ask me that, I'm so shocked by my ranking drop that I honestly don't know what to say. What *should* I say?

Or so I was wondering in a daze, when she made a difficult expression and looked at me.

"Honestly speaking, it was completely unexpected that you would fall this far, Kisshouin-san. I've seen your grades in primary school, and they were exceptional. I asked all the other teachers as well, and they all told me that you took your lessons seriously, your exams results were splendid, and that you were an excellent, model student. I thought so too. As a teacher, I had almost no worries about you."

"And yet," she continued, "how do you explain this drop in results? If something happened, please speak to me about it."

Well, even if she asks me how, it's simply that I fell in love and didn't study, so I definitely can't tell her the truth.

"I believe that I was simply lacking in effort this time. I truly apologise."

"You know, things have become a problem. It isn't just your results. Lately your attitude in class has been an issue as well. A number of teachers have told me that in class you simply sit there in a daze, without really trying. And the result can be seen in your grades. Just what on earth happened, I wonder."

Eh-, it's become this big of a deal? Just because my marks fell!?

Or rather, isn't this the kind of thing you say to problem students!?

Far from "as expected of Reika-sama", I've turned into one of those problem children that get called in to the counselling room!

"You know, Kisshouin-san, could it be that some bad boy is tricking you?"

“Hah?”

What’s this all of a sudden?

“When it comes to girls worsening their behaviour, most of the time a boy is involved. That the diligent model student that you were has changed this much... Could it be that you have begun dating some strange man?”

Sensei leaned forward as she asked this.

In other words, I began dating some bad man, and I fell onto the path of a delinquent?

Oh my gosh.

To think that while I was being over the moon, I almost got the label of ‘delinquent girl’ attached to me!

“No, absolutely not.”

Far from a bad boy, he’s the esteemed Student Council President, famous as a model student, and loved by all the teachers.

And far from dating him, I haven’t even had a chance to talk properly before.

All that I did was go “Guhuhu, Romeo-senpai~” and roll about in my room.

Even though this is all just because I accidentally lost control of my lazy side, the situation turned into a surprisingly huge matter!

“It has reached the point where we believe it would be best to try contacting your guardians.”

EEHH!? IT’S *THAT* BAD!?

And I’m even being brought up as an issue at your staff meetings!?

Aren’t there plenty of girls with way worse grades than me!? Why am I the only one

being portrayed like I'm on the straight road to delinquency!?

"Umm, it truly is not big deal. I simply became a little too relaxed this time. I am reflecting on it, and will try my best next time."

"...The staff here has great trust in you, Kisshouin-san. The shock we received from this was not small, you know. Also, would you consider taking summer remedials?"

"Remedials?"

In the middle school section, they have remedial classes during the summer break for kids with bad grades. Kids that are particularly studious also attend them, but they're in the minority.

Remedials... "As-Expected-of" Reika-sama going to remedials...

But going to those remedials also serves as a way for them to keep an eye on my behaviour.

After all, sometimes there are kids who undergo shocking changes during the summer break. That's exactly when kids start making bad friends.

But Sensei, far from bad friends, I barely have any normal friends. I have almost no friends who will play with me outside of school...

Just how on earth am I supposed to turn into a delinquent if I'm just sitting at home all day?

Well, can't be helped. You reap what you sow.

Now that it's come to this, all I can do is repair my reputation.

"I understand. I shall attend the remedials."

My first summer break as a middle school student, turned into quite a tearful event.

On the first day of remedials, I headed for school.

After I came out to my family about going to remedials, they were in shock.

Okaasama was bewildered, saying “With grades like this, must you go to remedials?”, but I think it’s more about the drop in my rankings that’s shocked the teachers.

But if I went with a stupidly honest reply like, “The teachers think I’m being tricked by a bad man.” things would really blow up, so I didn’t say a thing though.

As for Oniisama, he fell into thought as he looked at my report card.

I’m sorry for being a disappointing sister.

But I really have reflected a lot, this time.

Although it was pretty shocking that just a drop in grades turned into such a huge matter.

Still, I’ll admit that my lifestyle turned quite lazy.

I also inconvenienced a lot of people, and caused them to worry too.

My home tutor, Karin-sensei, became a little depressed because she thought it was the fault of her teaching style.

And also, becoming fatter because of my idle lifestyle is actually the biggest issue here. I used to have these clear dimples when I smiled, but lately they’ve become harder to see because of the meat.

I’ve been ignoring it as just my imagination, but my big tummy was yelling at me, “This is your reality!”

This won’t do. I like A-line dresses, but an A-line figure is definitely a no.

This rounded tanuki stomach is definitely a no!

I’ve decided that this summer break, I’m going to turn over a new leaf and try my best.

The remedial lessons weren’t arranged in classes, and instead each grade would be

grouped together in one room.

When I entered the classroom, the students already in there looked at me in shock.

Gokigen'yoh, everyone.

Even though I was supposed to have put on a friendly smile, all of them averted their eyes. Why.

Almost all the kids in the room were those with bad grades, and not only that, the ones that didn't stand out at school. Well, I suppose you could say that they're the bottom caste in the school hierarchy.

Even the kids here out of enthusiasm are all just swots and hardcore crammers.

Not a single person from my caste was here.

Even within my very own group, there are kids with grades worse than mine, but those girls all have a private tutor, or go to cram school, and would never go to remedials.

And neither would any of the more rebellious kids come.

Pretty much everybody here belongs to the harmless, docile type, and they're all the type that quietly live out their lives at school.

When I took a seat at the back of the classroom, one of the students sitting near me, slooowly moved to another seat.

Some of the kids with friends were forming small islands, but I was stuck living on a deserted one.

When I looked out the window, oh my? Was that a mirage just now? The scenery swayed.

...I'm definitely not crying or anything.

The recompense for being over the moon about love, turned out to be quite large.

This heartrendingly lonely remedial lifestyle, was only just beginning.

CHAPTER 51

It's been a few days since my remedials began, but I'm still living on a deserted island. Even when the printouts were being passed from the front, they were oddly careful with me. And they wouldn't look me in the eyes, either.

Am I scary? Everybody, am I really that scary?

Are you afraid that I'll show you hell if you displease me?

I don't mind at all when I'm alone at cram school. I'd be fine with it even now.

But to think that I would have to endure being alone at school...

Normally at school it's always lively with my friends and followers around me.

But despite being in that very same school, right now I'm alone.

I finally know what Sakura-chan meant, that time when Akizawa-kun was home sick from cram school.

If you're alone from the beginning then it doesn't matter, but if you're always with somebody else and have them suddenly taken away, it makes you feel really vulnerable and lonely.

Hmmm~ At this rate I'm going to start chatting with an imaginary friend, so this is getting quite scary if I do say so myself.

Because I don't really want people to think I'm lonely, I've got this '*I'm completely fine*' look on my face, with my textbook open in front of me. I'm not 'lonely', I'm a 'loner'. I'm proud, and lofty and aloof.

But thanks to that, everybody is too afraid to approach me, so it's just a vicious circle. I wonder if by the time this ends, I'll have made even one friend.

Because I'm Pivoine as well as the daughter of a powerful family, my appearance is flawless from my curled hair, to my nails, but I'm actually quite a nice girl, you know~ I won't bully you, you know~ I'm not scary, you know~

I started my diet recently, so I haven't been eating my favourite foods. Because of that,

my heart is a bit weak it seems.

Before I began my 'tanuki stomach removal plan', I warned Otousama to stop bringing me presents.

Lately, he seemed to be bringing a lot of stuff, so although I was wondering what was up, I happily ate it anyway since he went out of his way to get it.

I'm just a poor person at heart, so I never leave behind food. Naturally, I appreciated Otousama's feelings, but I was also thinking about the farmers and workers who would feel hurt if their efforts were thrown into the bin, so I couldn't bring myself to waste any of it. I enjoyed every last bit.

And so I got round.

Otousama seemed shocked when I told him to stop, but when I bluntly said that I was getting fat, he replied with,

"Girls are cuter when they're a little round."

Naive! If I get fatter, my clothes won't match me. I'll get flabbier too, and there's nothing more disgraceful than having my stomach poke out when I sit down.

And to begin with, it's a defeat for me as a girl. It has nothing to do with the tastes of men.

Okaasama was completely supportive of me. And she also said,

"Actually, I've been thinking for a while now that you've been getting fatter, Reika-san."

...Please say that sooner.

Okaasama dragged me to a beauty salon, and I had my tummy meat ruthlessly massaged, and then warmed with infrared rays.

The result? Beauty salons cannot help me defeat my flab.

Anyway, right now I've gone back to my original plan of quietly and steadily exercising with a hula hoop in my room. Lately, I've even picked up the skill of spinning a hula

hoop while walking. The plan is going well.

When school begins after summer break, I shall unveil Kisshouin Reika – The Remake!

During the summer, besides my remedials I also have summer courses at cram school, as well as private lessons with Karin-sensei, so the days are filled with studying.

I think I'm studying even more than I did for my middle section entrance exams. I finished all of my holiday homework by halfway through July. Honestly, what a model student I am.

As for cram school, I'm happy that I can meet Aoi-chan there.

After experiencing days of being lonerised in my remedials, my time with Aoi-chan always soothes me.

Speaking of which, Aoi-chan used to be afraid of me too, didn't she.

"I am actually attending remedials at my school at the moment, but it seems that I am being kept at a distance by my classmates. Am I truly so loathsome to befriend? Do I seem so malicious to others?"

"Ehh-"

Aoi-chan's eyes began to swim.

"Umm, rather than loathsome to befriend, maybe it's more like, you're so gorgeous and flashy that they're shy? I don't think it's stuff like looking malicious or anything. Yeah."

"Shy, is it."

"Mn. You're a beautiful ojousama, so it doesn't seem like you'd give normal people the

time of day, or maybe I should say that it seems like you'd ignore us even if we spoke to you. Yeah, something like that, I think. But once they get to know you, I'm sure you'll get along.

"Okay?" she added with a smile.

AOI-CHAAAAAAN!

"Thank you, Aoi-chan!" I said in the confusion.

She looked a little shocked, but then she immediately smiled again and said,

"Try your best, Reika-chan."

Anyway, Aoi-chan advised me that rather than awkwardly complimenting them, it would be better to try greeting them first.

Basically, if I keep greeting them each day, perhaps they'll feel closer to me.

She said stuff like,

"I'm sure they'll be happy to be greeted by a person like you, Reika-chan,"

so I'm totally happy right now. Try your best, me!

Today my parents are out, so Oniisama is picking me up from cram school, and then we're going out to have dinner.

When I told Aoi-chan about it, she said

"What a wonderful Oniisan. How nice~"

Oniisama has come to pick me up a few times already, so Aoi-chan has met him too. Ever since, she often says “I’m jealous that you have such a wonderful Oniisan.” Apparently she has two older brothers as well, but in the past when I asked her about what they were like, she only muttered “...Muscles, and otaku,” before averting her eyes.

The atmosphere that she gave off made me reluctant to press further, but I actually still want to know so badly. What exactly does she mean by ‘muscles, and otaku’?

Anyway, after Oniisama picked me up, we went and ate at an ethnic French restaurant. An excessive diet is bad for the body, so I’ve been making sure to eat properly, and to just cut down on sweet things.

But you know, cutting down on sweet foods is really hard for a person like me~ When I looked at the menu, my eyes kept getting drawn to them. But I’ll endure. If I eat it, I’ll be a baby tanuki for life.

“Are you, having trouble with remedials?” asked Oniisama.

“Once I grew used to it, they were fine. Although, having both homework assigned for the holiday, as well as homework for each day of remedials, might be a little difficult.”

“I see. You’re thinner than usual, so I was worried that it might have been the remedials.”

“Eh-, I have gotten thinner!?”

So the effects of the diet are...! I’ve been too afraid to use the scales, but when I smile in the mirror, I see my dimples have returned, so could this mean that I’ve gone back to normal?

Then maybe it’d be fine to order dessert...

“If you’re overdoing things, then you can take a break from cram school, okay?”

“I truly am fine. This is thanks to cutting down on sweets, and doing stretches every night. Ah, and the hula hoop as well. You saw me with it the other day, did you not?”

“Ahh, *that*, huh...”

The other day, Oniisama visited my room while I was in the middle of challenging my record, so he knew what I was talking about.”

“Well, leaving the hula hoop aside, Reika, I heard that you have somebody you like now?”

“EHH!”

The sudden change in subject caused my heart to stop.

“Why so suddenly... Ah-! Could it have been Imari-sama!?”

“Yeah.”

“Ehhh~! Even though he promised to keep it a secret from youu...”

“It’s your fault for talking to someone like *him* about it.”

It’s because I thought that Imari-sama would be able to give me some good advice. And he even came to our house at just the right time.

“Well, who is it?”

“Eh~...”

“So you can tell Imari, but not me...”

Oniisama’s expression turned sorrowful.

“That is not the case at all! It is the Student Council President of the middle school section!”

I immediately confessed.

“The Student Council President. Hmm~ What kind of kid is he?”

“He is a person who well suits Orff’s O Fortuna. But I have scarcely had the chance to talk to him. I simply watch him from afar.”

“Suiting that song is... Isn’t he pretty dangerous then?”

“Goodness, no. He is a very dynamic and cool person. As the Student Council President, he has leadership as well.”

“Hmm.”

I haven’t seen Romeo-senpai ever since summer break began. How lonely.

“That cookie practice was to give him some handmade sweets, right?”

“Yes, but Imari-sama advised that I did not, and so in the end I never did.”

Yeah. Thinking about it, if some strange underclassman suddenly gave you some kookies, you might really be surprised, huh.

Thank goodness I listened to Imari-sama.

“Oh yes, that reminds me, Oniisama. Will Imari-sama be coming over to play soon? Last time I received a wonderful biidoro glass toy from Nagasaki from him, remember? It is terribly cute, and I have grown quite fond of it, so I wish to thank him again.”



A biidoro toy from Nagasaki.

He bought it for me when he went to visit relatives there, and it's really pretty and colourful.

When the light shines through it, it sparkles, and when you blow on it it makes cute *pakkin pakkin* sounds. Only, it's supposed to be making *poppin* sounds instead, so why...?

But geez, Imari-sama really knows what girls like, doesn't he.

“Imari is busy, so I doubt he'll be coming over for a while.”

Oniisama gave me a bright smile.

Well that's a shame...

CHAPTER 52

In the end I never did make a friend.

I followed Aoi-chan's advice and each day I could greet kids sitting near me with a smiling "Gokigen'yoh," but on the first day a few of them acted strangely. I continued doing that each day, and eventually they became able to greet me back normally.

But it never developed further. I decided to think of it as lucky just that they weren't afraid of me anymore.

After that, school began again. When I met my group again for the first time in a while, they said,

"My, Reika-sama. Have you slimmed down?"

You guys... You really *did* notice that I was getting fat, didn't you.

I won't forgive you if you were secretly calling me drill-hair tanuki, okay?

Once they found out that I had been going to remedials, for some reason they said

"As expected of Reika-sama. Truly devoted in your studies."

and interpreted things conveniently for me. I decided not to correct them.

The first order of business after school began again was working out the participation lists for the athletics carnival.

Now that we're middle schoolers, we have a student council, meaning that we now had representatives from the clubs, as well as an athletics committee to do the work, instead of an executive committee like in primary.

Although, class representatives had to do various jobs together with the athletics committee instead.

I was enthusiastic about it.

I finally had a point of contact with the student council!

If it's for Senpai's sake, then I'll move my hands and feet as much as he needs!

I immediately headed to the Student Council room to help organise!

There are more relays in middle school. I hate running, so I'm trying to avoid them as best I can.

Aside from the great skipping rope and ball toss events, I was invited by my friends to join the three-legged race.

The most troubling event was the boys' cavalry battle. We had a hard time deciding on the candidates. And of course. Because *that* guy is going to appear in it for sure.

From the boys who had competed with him in it before, I once heard that he was apparently terrifying in his pursuit, and completely different to any other contender.

I bet that Emperor is busy deciding on his horse right now. Apparently if you're chosen as the horse, you'll be forced into secret after school training. That way even his horse stands above the rest.

Considering that, yeah, I doubt anybody would want to join. I'm glad I'm not a boy.

In the end, we decided to send some ExternalS who didn't know the story, and some unlucky boys who lost in rock-paper-scissors. Try your best, guys.

Anyway, now that we managed to somehow get the participation sorted out, I was on my way to the meeting for the athletics carnival, organised by the Student Council. Come on, Class Rep, let's go. Don't dawdle like that.

Because Miharuchan is going to the meeting as well, Class Rep was standing there, using the reflection in the window to do his hair. He's a total maiden.

When we got there, everybody else had already arrived. And naturally, sitting in the

middle was President Romeo-senpai.

Aahh, it's been so long since I've seen him up close!

Perhaps he went to the beach during the break because he had this tan that gave him even more of a wild look.

The corners of my mouth started to rise naturally, so I grit my teeth to stop it. I don't want him to think of me as some weirdo girl who smiles to herself all of a sudden. But my muscles just keep moving on their own!

Our gazes met! He looked at me weirdly! Do I really look strange after all!?

The meeting went over the assignment of responsibilities and important points to remember, and at the end of the meeting we handed in our class participation lists. Suddenly, looking at printouts, Romeo-senpai said,

"Speaking of which, apparently there's a crazy strong guy appearing in the cavalry battle?

"I'll be participating too. I wonder if I can win."

WHA-!?

Romeo-senpai is participating in the cavalry battle!? Then I definitely have to cheer him on!

When it came to my turn to hand my list over,

"Senpai. Please try your best in the cavalry battle," I said, after gathering my courage.

Although Senpai looked a little surprised, he immediately smiled at me and said,

"Thank you."

I did it!

My plan to get close to Senpai during the preparations went almost entirely unfulfilled. The class reps did nothing but odd jobs for their class, and the preparations for the athletics carnival was almost all handled by the Student Council, the sports clubs, and the athletics committee.

Even so, whenever there was even a slight reason to head to the student council room, I would take the initiative to go.

The student council members gave me ambivalent looks, so I silently threatened them not to say anything uncalled for.

Just one time, when there were snacks left over in the Pivoine Salon, I secretly stole them all and presented them to Senpai. When I did, he said,

“Oohh! These are delicious. Thanks!”

with a dazzling smile, and I almost blurted out,

“For that smile, I’ll smuggle you as many sweets as you want!”

But geez, even though Senpai eats so many sweets, he doesn’t get fat at all. Speaking of which, Kaburagi is always eating macarons and chocolates in the salon, but he doesn’t have any needless flab either.

Isn’t that kind of unfair?

The day of the athletics carnival arrived. I once again put on the high strength sunscreen that Okaasama gave me, and participated as well.

I didn’t participate in any of the main events, so I tried my best to cheer for them.

When it came to the great skipping rope, the other classes made some mistakes, and

it ended quite well for me. I never even imagined that it would be this tiring though. For the club-vs-club costumed relay, Akizawa-kun from the Track and Field Club ran in a Snow White costume so I took a photo with my digital camera. I'll show Sakura-chan later. You actually turned kind of beautiful, you know, Akizawa-kun.

As for Kaburagi and Enjou in their relays, they ended up surrounded by girls bringing honeyed lemon. Even if you give them that many, they won't be able to finish them... Honeyed lemon appears a lot in manga and novels as the clichéd thing you give to people in sports clubs, but I've never actually tried them. Are they yummy?

Anyway, the events went on, and in the afternoon, it was finally time for the cavalry battle.

When Team Emperor arrived, the cheering got noticeably louder. Emperor sitting with dignity on his heavily breathing horse. They must have trained a lot. Their confidence was palpable.

I could hear "Kaburagi-samaaa!" and "Emperor!" from here and there. Upfftpfft.

And then, Romeo-senpai and his team entered as well. Try your best, Senpai!

I wanted to actually say it aloud, but because of all the people around, I could only say it in my heart. Uwahh~ So vexing!

Besides the loud cheers for Kaburagi and Enjou, there started to also be cries of "Tomoe-kuuun! Try your beeest!" mixed in too.

This is bad. Senpai seems more popular than expected. I have lots of rivals. This is terrible.

While I was panicking, the battle began.

Kaburagi crushed nearby teams one after another, charging at teams that were trying to escape. T-, That was a team from my class. He's being dragged along. He's falling. Ah. He fell.

Yeah, you guys did your best. It looked like the other people crushed by Kaburagi were

consoling each other. May you rest in peace.

Romeo-senpai hasn't lost yet. While giving out accurate instructions, he captured enemies. How wonderful, Senpai!

After the battlefield ran out of prey, it was only Kaburagi and Romeo-senpai left over. Romeo-senpai! Romeo-senpai, do your best!

While I was praying with all my heart, one of my friends sitting next to me said,

"Don't worry. Kaburagi-sama will surely win."

You're wrong! I was praying for the other one!

As Emperor and Romeo-senpai fought, they seemed about even. Neither I nor the audience had ever seen the undefeated Emperor struggle like this. We were shocked. Could it be that he'll win!? Or so I thought, when Senpai's horse stumbled, and Kaburagi used that gap to steal his headband.

The field was blanketed in loud cheers. It was the loudest it had ever been today. Although Senpai lost, he still smiled like he was having fun. As for Emperor, who had been forced this far for the first time, seemed a little frustrated despite his victory. That guy is definitely going to practice even harder next year, huh...

After the tallies, it was Romeo-senpai's class that won overall. But the MVP was the Emperor, who won in both relays and the cavalry battle.

Emperor held his trophy in one hand, and raised it towards the sky. You really are having fun, huh.

CHAPTER 53

Right after the athletics carnival was the mid-sem exams, and thanks to my remedials and cramming, I somehow made it back as far as 16th place. I let out a secret sigh of relief. With this, the teachers should trust me again.

But Enjou and Kaburagi are at the top as always. This time it was Enjou that was 1st place though.

I bet it's because of *that*, right? Kaburagi was too busy training for the cavalry battle. I wonder what on earth makes him so obsessed with that.

Our next class was in another room, so I was walking with the friends in my class when I noticed a girl walking our way with her head hanging.

Hm? Wasn't that girl in my remedials? What was her name again?

As she got closer, I noticed a group of girls laughing from behind her. When the girl noticed, she left with hurried steps.

"What was the name of the girl who just walked past us, again?"

"Who knows. I've seen her face though."

"That girl is in the same class as Ayame-san, isn't she? Remember? The one who messed up during the great skipping rope event."

"Aahh, *that* girl."

"Great skipping rope event? Speaking of which, I do believe I heard something about a big failure in Ayame-san's class for that event."

"Apparently she practised quite a bit, so Ayame-san was frustrated as well, wasn't she."

I see. So that's the girl who stacked it?

The girls behind her seemed to be in the same class. I wonder if she's finding it uncomfortable to be there.

"Ah, Mochida-san. She's being isolated in class at the moment."

At lunch break, I tried asking Oomiya Ayame-chan about the earlier girl, while we were eating together.

"Isolated? Why?"

"Everybody practised really hard for the event, so when she messed up at the very beginning and disqualified us, she earned a lot of ire. My class had quite a bit of confidence that we would do well, after all."

Ehh~ Because of something like that?

"When it happened I was angry as well, but of course I am not angry any longer. Only, the problem is that it wasn't just the skipping. She stumbled during the three-legged race as well, and even injured somebody else."

"She injured somebody?"

"It was simply a scrape on the knees, but the issue is that the injured girl belongs to Tsuruhana-san's group."

Tsuruhana Maki. The leader of the gyaru group, huh. What terrible luck to injure a girl from that group.

I did the three-legged race too, but the girl I was paired with said "Reika-sama! Let us

pace ourselves loudly!" and pulled me along, so we managed to run smoothly until the end.

If I remember correctly, one of the contending classes for top suddenly dropped in rankings. So that was Mochida-san, huh~

"Ever since then, Mochida-san has been eyed by Tsuruhana-san's group."

"Is she being bullied?"

"I wouldn't say that. But I do hear them bad-mouthing and blaming her."

Isn't that bullying then?

"All this just because of the athletics carnival?"

"I understand what you mean. To us, simply watching Kaburagi-sama and Enjou-sama's exploits is enough, but Tsuruhana-san's group is a lot more athletic, and seem to be enthusiastic about sporting events like that."

Aahh~ Yeah, there are girls like those too, huh.

The girls around me started to heatedly discuss the Two Tops.

"The dead heat during the relay!"

"Enjou-sama was so cool during sprint!"

"But the coolest really was the Emperor during the cavalry battle. He was so skilled~"

"Speaking of the cavalry battle, the Student Council President was wonderful as well, wasn't he."

WHAAT!?

“Yes, certainly. I had no idea that the middle school StuCo President was such a dreamy person. Tomoe-senpai, wasn’t it.”

“Yes, Tomoe Senju-senpai. He joined the middle school as an External, and his grades are always in the top three; a model student. He’s skilled in basketball too, you know.”

“He’s a little scary when he’s silent, but once he smiles he’s cute.”

“I know exactly what you mean~!”

OH MY GOD!

When did I get all these rivals!? And some of them know even more than me!

Pretty much the only thing I’ve ever done for him is smuggle him some sweets from the Pivoine after the athletics carnival.

When he thanked me with a smile, my heart fluttered so much. I really wanted to bring him some more stuff, but then I realised that with my personality, I might really be tricked by some bad guy, and turn into his wallet, so lately I’ve been a little uneasy.

In order to give her the Snow White Akizawa-kun photo, I met up with Sakura-chan for the first time in a while.

Shockingly, we were chatting and drinking tea at a stylish open cafe. Having tea at a café? It’s like we’re totally friends! So nice!

I’ve been keeping in touch with her through lots of emails, because our schedules haven’t lined up, I haven’t been able to see her recently.

I only went to her house once during the summer break. That day I told her to keep

our conversation a secret from Akizawa-kun, and did nothing but talk about Senpai.

“So since then, you’ve made no progress? That’s hopeless. You even had a chance to get close to him during the athletics carnival.”

“But...”

Getting closer to him, is actually pretty difficult you know?

Sakura-chan is tough when it comes to love, so if I let her be she’ll just keep lecturing me.

I changed the subject.

“Audibly badmouthing them? Yes, that does happen a lot, doesn’t it.”

“Mn.”

I decided to tell her about Mochida-san.

She’s been on my mind since then, and I tried observing her, and it turns out that she probably was being targeted after all.

They weren’t openly bullying her, but would whisper stuff while walking past her, before snickering to each other. They were clearly hurting her.

“It happens in my school as well, but I don’t suppose there’s much you can do about those things except wait them out.”

“I see.”

In my old life, there was a time when people suddenly started ignoring me. They wouldn’t even tell me why. But after a while, the target would change, and they would speak to me as well.

I guess this sort of stuff happens no matter the age or world, huh.

I feel bad for Mochida-san, but we're in different classes, and don't know each other at all, so it would be hard to help her.

But at the moment they're just harassing her with sharp words, so I guess it might be fine?

Sakura-chan was really happy about the Snow White photo.

After I left the Cafe, I went and looked at some cute accessories with Sakura-chan at a miscellaneous goods store.



A miscellaneous goods store in Shimokitazawa.

Having a look at misc. goods stores on a day off? It's like we're totally friends! So nice! Anyway, while we were in the area, Sakura-chan suddenly said she wanted to go to a nearby shrine to a marriage god.

I wasn't really into it, but Sakura-chan wanted a charm no matter what, so I decided to follow her.

Sakura-chan got 'middle blessing'. I thought it was a plenty good result, but she said "I don't know about that. Takumi still isn't decisive about us, you know," with a frown.

I brought Senpai's face to mind, before pulling a charm. Bring it on! My first charm since 'future blessing'!

"Hii!"

Shockingly, it was 'curse'. It's my first time getting a curse. So they really exist...

Sakura-chan peered in from the side, and then immediately backpedalled. Stop that! Stop treating me as cursed!

'The awaited person, will not come. The things you lost, you will not find. Chance of proposal is far off. Very dim prospects.'

"Ummmm, when you get a bad fortune, apparently you're supposed to tie it to a tree with just your left hand, okay?"

"...Really?"

"Y-, Yeah."

I folded up my terrifying fortune, and tried to tie it just like Sakura-chan said.

But it was harder than expected.

It was so hard that I messed up and it fell on the ground.

Should I purify myself and go home?

CHAPTER 54

Sensei told me to collect the notes we made in class for her.

Together with Class Pres, I brought them to the staff room just as Sensei had created some documents to hand over to the Student Council.

I immediately declared that I would deliver them.

The committee chairman was giving me an ambivalent gaze again. I don't care!

When I entered the student council room, Romeo-senpai was eating a high class Ginza rusk.



When I handed him the documents, he gave me a dazzling smile. Uu, his gaze is shooting through me!

“You’re such a hard worker, Kisshouin-san. How about entering the Student Council next year? Should I recommend you?”

“No...! I would not be suitable at all...”

There’s no meaning in a Student Council with no Romeo-senpai. The only reason I’m so hard-working is because I have another motive.

“I don’t think I’d agree, but, well, you are still a Pivoine huh. I guess it’d be impossible

for you to join. I personally think it'd be great if you acted as a bridge for us, though."

"That is... But if there is something I can do, I will do my very best to assist."

"Really? Then if anything happens, I'll count on you, okay?"

"Yess...!"

My wonderful senpai saw me out with a smile.

Man, he's cool as everr.

But...

...A high class Ginza rusk?

After that, I headed straight for the Pivoine Salon.

A few people were in, and drinking tea gracefully while chatting.

An onesama from the high school section was playing chopin on the piano.

I looked at the various things on the platter on the table.

Financiers.



Dacquoise.



Galette.



Nougat.



Rusk...

High class Ginza rusk."



There's no mistake.

A Pivoine member other than me has been smuggling sweets to Senpai.

When I first met Senpai, what he said at the time made me go, "Huh?"

"I nicked it from the Pivoine though!"

How, I wondered. Only Pivoine members were allowed in the salon, so sneaking in to steal them would make you an amazing thief. And since it was the Pivoine you were stealing from, it would turn into a huge issue too.

But I never heard anything about a person charging in to steal things. Of course, neither did I hear anything about Senpai getting permission to enter.

But despite that, Senpai occasionally eats sweets. In Suiran, you aren't allowed to bring sweets. Although, for events like Valentine's, they'll turn a blind eye.

Anyway, the only ones who can eat snacks at Suiran are the Pivoine, inside the salon. Of course, the Student Council, who are supposed to act as models for the ordinary students, are definitely not allowed.

Then that means one of the Pivoine members supplies him with the sweets.

Who?

It's time to make a comeback as a spy.

Starting the next day, I began keeping a lookout in the Pivoine Salon, and started to check who was bringing snacks home with them.

Normally, you wouldn't expect anybody to regularly do this.

Even I worry about what people think, so I've only procured offerings for Senpai a few times.

Anyway, while I was watching, I noticed a senpai get the concierge to separate a few snacks for her.

She left the salon, so I followed.

If I remember correctly, that's Fukakusa Kasumi-sama from the middle school's third year.

She isn't as gorgeous as Yurie-sama's group in the Pivoine's main faction, but she's tidy, clean-looking and peaceful.

Fukakusa-senpai went as far as a small flowerbed behind the school building.

She started looking left and right, as though to check for any onlookers, before a voice called out,

"Kasumi."

It was Romeo-senpai.

Fukakusa-senpai ran over in delight. Then, the two sat down by the flowerbed, and enjoyed a happy chat together.

They were talking quietly so I couldn't hear the contents, but from stuff like how Fukakusa-senpai happily watched him eat the sweets, or how Romeo-senpai stroked her head, I could more or less guess.

I left.

After a while, Fukakusa-senpai emerged from behind the school building. She seemed like she was about to leave for home, so before she reached the parking lot, I called out to her.

“Fukakusa-senpai.”

“Kyaa-!”

When I did, she let out an adorable scream.

“Eh-, Kisshouin-san? What’s the matter?”

“Senpai, I shall go straight to the point. Are you in a relationship with the Student Council President?”

Her face immediately stiffened.

“Why?”

“Earlier, I spotted the two of you by chance. And occasionally, the Student Council President will eat sweets from the Pivoine. And thus I wondered whether he was close to somebody on the inside, you see.”

“ ... ”

After that, I found out various things from her.

About how they were in the same class last year, and gradually grew closer.

About how after they changed classes in third year, Romeo-senpai confessed to her.

About how Romeo-senpai was the StuCo President, so they had to keep things a secret from everyone else.

About how Romeo-senpai got hungry a lot, she would occasionally bring sweets from the Pivoine to him.

About how so that she wouldn’t be found out, he claimed that he “nicked” them etc.

etc.

“Must you go so far to hide it?”

“Because the Pivoine and Student Council have always opposed each other. And this year’s Pivoine President, Okishima-senpai, really loathes the Student Council. Senju said that we should just be open about it, but I’m afraid. The Pivoine might give me the cold shoulder.”

Ah-, she just called him Senju like nothing.

“Kasumi” and “Senju”. Hehh~ Hohh~ Hmmm~

“Please, Reika-sama. Don’t tell anybody about this.”

“I shall not. I do not know if I can help you in any way, but I hope that you will be happy together.”

“Really!? Thank you! You know, Senju said that you might be able to become a bridge between the Pivoine and Student Council. I think so too!”

“You overestimate me. I have no intentions of entering the Student Council, either.”

Did he recommend me out of self-interest?

After all, at this rate the two of them won’t be able to openly date in high school either. But with him openly eating Pivoine sweets like that, I think they’ll be caught eventually.

Could that also be part of his plans?

“You’re strong, Reika-sama. Even though you’re younger than me, I admire you a little bit, you know? Umm, I was thinking that it would be great if we could become closer.

Is that no good?"

"No, I would be honoured."

Fukakusa-senpai smiled happily at me. She seems unreliable, and cute. I wonder if this is what drew Romeo-senpai's attention. She's the complete opposite of me.

After that, I started calling her by name, and I agreed to occasionally hear her out about love.

I rode the car home, and then collapsed onto my bed.

Tomoe-senpai was Romeo, but his Juliet was Fukakusa-senpai.

Somebody like me was just a mob character, or Juliet's wet nurse at best.

...I wanted to get all excited about love as well. Everybody always talks so happily about love, but only I'm the one living a dull life.

What the hell. Couldn't they have let me dream a little longer?

I shouldn't have investigated. All it did was needlessly show me reality.

UOHHH! What the heck am I going to do if I'm single for the rest of my life?

For some reason I can't even picture myself in a proper relationship.

I mean, I got 'curse'!

I bet in both lives, I've been stuck with the fate of being forever unpopular.

UOHHHH! I don't want to spend life being a stalking horse! UOHHHH!

UOHHHHHH! ...

The next free day I had, Oniisama brought me to a zoo in Hokkaido. I've been wanting

to go for a while now, so I'm super happy!

A polar bear! A seal! A penguin!

"Oniisama, please bring me again, okay!?"

"Yeah. I really wonder when the next time will be."

?? Does that mean Oniisama will be busy?

But he promised that he would definitely bring me here again someday, so I decided not to think about it.

CHAPTER 55

I thought the situation with Mochida-san would return to normal after a while, but it dragged out unexpectedly.

Sometimes she would be called out and have complaints said to her face, and other times she would have her things hidden. Not full-blown bullying, but things like whispering “You’re so damned gloomy.” or “You’re ruining the mood.” and then snickering to each other.

They sure seem to be having fun, I thought.

As for Mochida-san, it would have been fine if she just ignored them and lived normally, but she became more and more timid, and more and more gloomy, and just made herself needlessly vulnerable.

Once humans start feeling negative, there’s almost no end to how bad it gets, huh.

I only have whatever impression I formed of her during the remedials, but she already seemed like quite a plain girl at the time. I guess she was the easily bullied type to begin with.

Even Aoi-chan is good at studying despite her quietness, and apparently she’s actually good at sports too, and since she’s an energetic girl that likes the outdoors, girls like her don’t get targeted for bullying so much.

Mochida-san, on the other hand, is bad enough at academics to have to go to remedials, and from her results at the athletics carnival, I assume she’s bad at sports too, and on top of that she looks plain. Just full of openings.

I heard she has friends, so she probably isn’t completely isolated, but I wonder when this will cool down.

But well, even if I’m thinking about that, she’s a total stranger from another class. Not only that, it isn’t even full-blown bullying, so I had decided to just watch from the side, when one day, I went to the infirmary and met her by chance.

I hurt my finger with a papercut, so I went to get a bandaid, and met Mochida-san, since she was there to get medicine for stress-related gastritis. Uwahh...

I startled her when I entered the room, and she began trembling all over with a frightened expression.

Sorry for looking so scary.

Mochida-san looked worse for wear than when I saw her during the remedials, and she was skinnier too.

Apparently she's even more sensitive than I expected.

"Gokigen'yoh, Mochida-san. Is the nurse in? I am here for a bandaid, but..."

"...Ah, she had something to attend to, so she left just now..."

"My, is that so. Then would it be fine if I simply enter?"

It's just a cut on my fingertips, so it isn't a big deal, but it hurts so I wanted a bandaid. My friends all told me "Reika-sama, please quickly treat your hand!" too. They actually wanted to come with me to the infirmary, but I thought it was a bit much for such a small injury, so I turned them down and went by myself.

I'm glad I did. Imagine how much worse it would be if they were here.

I grabbed one of the cotton balls soaked in disinfectant with some tweezers, and then sterilised my fingertip.

I wasn't using my good hand though, so it was quite hard and clumsy.

"Mochida-san, could I trouble you to help me with the bandaid? I do not think it would go well using my left hand."

"Eh-"

Mochida-san had been sitting there with her head hung, and her hands over her stomach. When I called out to her, she looked up at me in surprise.

I held out the bandaid to her.

Although she was timid, she took it from me, and taped up my finger.

“Are you all right, Mochida-san?”

“Eh-”

“You do not look well.”

“Ah-, ...yes. I’m fine...”

“I see.”

The world isn’t filled with heroes who’ll save people from their crises. In the end, you have to take care of your problems yourself.

But I think that you still need emotional support for that.

“Hey, Mochida-san. Won’t you become my friend?”

“Eh-!”

It probably wouldn’t be possible to have her join my group. She’s just too different. If I asked it as a favour, I think the other girls would agree, but it would be hard because they would still have nothing to talk about.

“Greeting each other in the mornings, and emailing each other on our phones. That kind of friend. Ah, which reminds me, do you in fact have a phone?”

“Y-, Yes.”

“Then won’t you exchange your mail address with me? Message me when you have nothing to do, or when you feel like talking, for example. I mightn’t be able to answer straight away, though.”

When I was given the silent treatment in my old life, it was during break times and lunch times that I had it the hardest.

Because I couldn’t talk to anybody, I spoke to imaginary friends in my mind.

If Mochida-san has somebody to talk to, maybe things will be easier on her.

And if people know that I’m on good terms with her, the way people see her should change.

“Umm, I am actually somewhat aware of the situation you have found yourself in. But I do not think that it would be best for you if I confront them directly. It would probably only add oil to the fire, and you too would not appreciate being outed as a bullying victim in front of everyone, correct?”

“ ... ”

“So please hold on for a while longer. Just do things with your head held high. There isn’t any reason to hang your head. And perhaps, trim your fringe a little? I think it might make your face look a little brighter. If you have complaints, then I will listen, so message me. All right? If after all of that, you still find it too much, then at that time I will definitely help you.”

Mochida-san began to cry. Large tears dropped from her face.

I just stayed quiet, and stroked her skinny back.

Starting the next day, I began intimately greeting her whenever we passed in the

hallway.

My friends all looked shocked, so I explained to them that she helped me with my bandaid in the infirmary. One of the older sister-types in my group said “It looks like Reika-sama has been in your care. Thank you very much.” like she was my guardian or something, so we all had a good laugh.

Later on she sent me faint-hearted messages like “They talked about me behind my back earlier” and “Everybody laughed at me. It hurts.”

Hmmm~ When you mistake the school for the whole world, things like that really hurt, huhh.

She told me before that she liked to draw, so I decided to try advising her to find some hobby friends on the internet and outside of school.

As the days passed by like that, one day, I came across the gyaru-group in the hallway. Tsuruhana-san looked at me, so I silently looked back.

I don’t know what the future holds, but right now I’m higher in the school hierarchy, and the leader of the biggest girls group in our grade.

Right now, I can’t lose.

I glared at her, and with my gaze I asked her, “Do you intend to pick a fight with me?”

I could feel the air around my friends becoming belligerent as well.

After a while, it was Tsuruhana-san who averted her gaze first, and her group simply continued down the hallway.

...I won.

T-, That was scary. I’ve never been good at dealing with flashy girls like her. Thank goodness they backed down.

The girls around me got angry, saying things like “What’s with her attitude!” but she’ll hear you guys, so please stop.

I’m a coward, so fights are scaryy...

After a while, Mochida-san grew gradually more cheerful, and she started being able to talk to her old friends again.

From what I could tell, she was gaining her weight back too. It looks like my weight-gain advice has been working. The trick is to snack before sleeping.

I hear that the badmouthing from Tsuruhana-san’s group has been dying down as well.

About a month later, the messages from Mochida-san finally stopped altogether.

CHAPTER 56

It's almost Oniisama's coming of age ceremony.

I bought him cufflinks as a celebratory present.

I actually wanted to buy him a necktie he could use for the ceremony, but Oniisama got an entire suit set from a British tailor, so I didn't have the composure to say anything.

Also, I don't really have much dress sense for ties...

I don't really know what sort of ties are stylish and stuff. And for some reason my eyes keep going to the really striking patterns.

If he was wearing a suit from a splendid tailor, but only his tie was crazy, everybody would laugh at him. That would be horrible!

Oniisama is the heir of the Kisshouin family so for the ceremony he's going to greet lots of people and see lots of people! If everybody there started laughing at it, it would be the worst!

And so, in order to smooth over my slightly odd tastes, I decided on cufflinks. Oniisama agreed too.

Anyway, I went with Oniisama to a store to pick them out, but there were too many interesting designs so I didn't know which to pick!

They ranged from your normal innocuous gemstone cufflinks to vehicle and animal motifs, and even mascots designs.

Vehicles might be good, but I'm not really into them. Ah-, the ones with star and snow crystals sure are cute. A broken heart is unlucky! Maybe animals after all? Uwah, reptiles are a bit...

In the end, I remembered the zoo he brought me to in autumn, so I went with the polar bears, as well as dolphins for summer. Ah-, I'll get the penguin ones too.

This should tell Oniisama that I want him to take me again.

I do think they were a little childish, but Oniisama said they were fine, and cufflinks aren't all that obvious anyway, so I guess it's fine, right?

Also you can get order-made cufflinks too, so maybe I'll get them to make some Tarow the Taro ones and give them to Oniisama. ...He's definitely not going to use them.

After Oniisama's coming of age ceremony, he's going to be attending classes while learning about the Kisshouin businesses on the side. Apparently he's going to follow around Otousama's secretary and learn all sorts of things.

Oniisama is diligent and talented. If Otousama is committing fraud, he'll definitely notice.

For a child like me, all I can really do is steadily brainwash him onto the path of righteousness. Oniisama is my only hope.

"Oniisama. You will be helping Otousama with his work from now on, will you not? If Otousama does anything bad, please, you must correct him, okay? But please do not publicly denounce him either. Just gently. Okay?"

When we finished shopping, we went to a café where I implored Oniisama to deal with him.

Oniisama made a slightly troubled expression, and asked me,

"Hah?"

He continued.

"Reika, ever since you were a child, you'll occasionally say things like that, huh. You keep talking like you're sure Dad is doing something bad. I feel a little sorry for him. A dad whose cute daughter doesn't trust him at all."

"But..."

He did that in the manga.

Otousama might have some troublesome parts to him like his ambition for our family, but he's essentially a good person who loves his family. Even though he's rich, he doesn't have any mistresses either, you know?

But just because he's a good father, and a good husband, doesn't mean that he's a good person.

There are plenty of people who turn into criminals for their families.

"Oh right! The stocks! Oniisama, you must make sure that people do not buy up our stocks and take over the company!"

"...What's influenced you this time?"

"Rather than influence... I suppose you could call it precognition?"

"I see. That's amazing."

Mu, he isn't believing me at all. But it's true, okay!

Because even if we make an enemy out of the Kaburagis, as long as Otousama isn't doing anything wrong, we'll be safe for a while.

"Anyway, Oniisama! I beg you! Please gently, and *secretly* deal with his crimes."

"Hahh, I get it already."

It's all on you, Oniisama. As for me, I should strengthen my brainwashing.

Term three began, and the third years are almost graduating. My first love, Tomoe-

senpai, is graduating as well. Having said that though, he's just going to enter the high school section. Still, that means we won't be seeing each other in the same school building anymore, huh.

Anyway, while I was thinking about these things, I got an invitation from Sakura-chan for lessons in hand-making Valentine's chocolates.

I never give chocolates to anybody but Oniisama and Otousama, so I don't really want to learn though. I don't plan on giving Tomoe-senpai chocolates either, after all.

But Sakura-chan was being persistent about it, so I gave in, and made plans to go with her to chocolate brownie lessons at a famous pâtisserie.

"Hey-! Measure the grams properly!"

"Eh-, I did measure them, you know?"

Each time I didn't use the spoons or measuring cups, Sakura-chan would scold me, so it was a little annoying.

Skilled chefs use their eyes to measure, you know? In my old life, Mum would never use spoons or whatever for cooking. She just threw in salt and sugar like that. There's really no need to fuss so much over these things.

Ah-, I spilled a little cocoa powder. Well whatever.

"Heyy!"

"Ehh? But it was just a littleeee."

Sakura-chan's eyes are scary when she gets mad...

Anyway, I tried the brownies a little once they were done, but they were really yummy. As expected of lessons from this pâtisserie! These are probably the best things I've ever made.

But apparently Sakura-chan was dissatisfied.

“I was an idiot for inviting you, Reika. To think that it would be this bad...”

“Eh? What is?”

After Sakura-chan compared the brownies we made together with the one the teacher made, she sighed.

Of course you wouldn't think it's tasty after comparing it to a pro's. Sakura-chan, aren't your ideals set a bit too high?

“You know, Reika, measurements are everything in sweets. You have to measure *everything* properly. Could it be that all your handmade chocolates so far were made sloppily like today's?”

“I wasn't being sloppy. I measured everything.”

“But when it said one teaspoon for example, you didn't flatten the surface. You just scooped and dunked.”

“Well, I guess?”

But it's fine. It was more or less measured.

“Reika, I won't say anything cruel. For the sake of your future, attend cooking class.”

“Eehhh~”

When I got home and gave the brownies to Oniisama and Otousama, I got more praise

than ever before.

See? You're being too uptight, Sakura-chan.

But if they praise me this much, I'm starting to actually want to take lessons.

The next day when I handed them to Aoi-chan, she said "They're really good! I was so surprised!" as well.

Both Oniisama and Otousama supported the cooking class idea as well, so maybe I'll think about it.

I want to go with Sakura-chan, but if she's going to nag at me each time like that, then...

Sakura-chan, you know, I think it'd be better if you were a little more relaxed in life.

CHAPTER 57

I became a second year.

But more importantly, this year Ririna will be entering Suiran.

So that girl was smart enough to make it in as an External...

Let's keep it a secret that I made light of her because I thought she was too wilful to study.

But now that Ririna is here, I guess that means my days of peace are at risk now.

I'd be happy if she didn't wrap me up in anything troublesome, but...

With her personality, will she be able to make any friends?

Or so I was wondering, but apparently with her overbearing personality, she immediately gained a bunch of lackeys and formed her own faction.

I had to sort of admire the way she was already walking about like she owned the place, even though she just got here.

You're amazing, Ririna.

Also, one ominous thing has happened.

Apparently my prided luck in class changes has come to an end.

I ended up in Enjou's class.

When I saw the class roster, I almost fell to my knees. It's over...

But at least it's not Kaburagi I guess. As long as I don't become enemies with Kaburagi, Enjou shouldn't be any problem.

Right, there shouldn't any problem.

—There was a huge problem.

The class was so noisy. Not just the girls in *my* class, but even the girls from other classes came to make a fuss during the break. While I wasn't in my best condition in the morning, the high-pitched sounds of girls damaged me further.

I've never been in their classes before, so I've gotten used to peace and quiet. This is

pretty harsh on me.

Enjou himself wouldn't really pay too much attention to the girls, and he spent most of his time with guy friends, but girls would still want to be with him and would squeal about him.

This noisiness doesn't really harm me as an outsider, but Enjou didn't look happy about it either, so I ended up sympathising with him. I guess things are bad when you're too popular as well, huh.

There are times when you want some quiet too. Aahh, I guess that's why they always come to the salon.

More than me at least.

I want to escape to the quiet salon too, now...

The teacher tried getting me to become class rep this year too, but I refused.

"If not the class representative, then at least the vice?" they asked, but I won't fall for that either. It's impossible for me.

If it was the peaceful classes I was used to, then perhaps I might have accepted, but I'm no match for this one. It's obvious that I'd suffer.

In Enjou's class, it seems hard to get anything done.

Just assigning seats was a huge fuss. The intensity for drawing the random seats was so intense. In all my other classes so far, people made a fuss too, but it was just at the level of wanting to be near the back or near the person they liked, but this was on another level.

It was the same for picking the various duties and the class reps. The girls all wanted to do something with Enjou, so it was hard getting it decided.

But too bad. Enjou isn't doing a thing. The noisy girls were all crestfallen.

That's right. I'd forgotten, but the privileged Pivoine members pretty much never do odd-jobs like this. They don't work for the students, the students work for them.

So then why have I been working so...?

But then Enjou also joined the executive committee for the athletics carnival in primary, didn't he. If Sensei asked him, maybe he would be class rep as well?

Rather, since the fuss is all centred on him, I think everything would go smoothly if he did it.

The two class reps that were chosen were exhausted before a month had even passed. Last year Miharu-chan was the class rep for Enjou's class, so maybe she's grown sick of him? Now's your chance. Do your best Maiden Class Rep.

Aahh, this is going to be a difficult year...

"So it's that difficult being in Shuusuke's class."

Aira-sama smiled happily as she listened to me.

"Well, there is no direct harm to me, but I am unaccustomed to the noise..."

Today the duo didn't come to the salon, so I could talk to Aira-sama about this.

Aira-sama is a third year this year, so she's been busier with studies than ever. Once I considered that she would be coming here less and less, I felt a little lonely.

Kaburagi was the same, since this is the last year he has with Yurie-sama in the salon. He wants to spend more time with her, but doesn't want to disturb her studies either, so apparently he's been agonising over this dilemma.

He's gotten better at hiding his emotions than he used to be, so I don't think he'd show it too much on the surface though.

But well, in exchange, he cheerfully sends her to her prep school. Do your best...

While we were talking about that, Enjou came to the salon. It's rare to see him without Kaburagi.

"Shuusuke, it's just you today?"

"Yeah. Masaya is sending Yurie off. You know that already, Aira."

With that, he came over to us. Ugeh.

“I just thought it was rare that you were coming to the salon alone, Shuusuke. I thought you’d immediately head home if Masaya wasn’t with you.”

“I have something after class, so I’m killing time until then. And it’d be annoying in class, so.”

“I’ve heard. You’re in Reika-chan’s class, apparently.”

Uwah, please don’t say anything strange, Aira-sama.
Enjou looked at me and smiled.

“Yeah. But although we’re in the same class, we almost never talk.”

“Indeed.”

Because there’s no reason to.

“Shuusuke, don’t cause her too much trouble, okay? Apparently a lot of girls are really lively around you.”

“I warn them, but it’s hard getting them to listen. So as long as they don’t do anything extreme, I’m just ignoring them. Reika-san, can’t you do something about them?”

“Hah? Why must *I*?”

“Because you’re the leader of the girls, right? If you speak out, won’t they behave?”

Please don’t talk about people like they’re the Grand Chamberlain.

And also, the ones making the most fuss is Tsuruhana-san's group. I think the girls in my group are quite respectable in their fusses. Probably.

"I do not have such power. Why do *you* not speak out?"

"I do, you know? But if I'm too harsh like Masaya, then they start crying, and it gets even worse."

Enjou looked a little fed up.

I guess it really isn't something to be happy about.

"Speaking of which, don't you have a cousin, Kisshouin-san? I hear that lately she's been approaching Masaya and getting into fights with the second and third year girls."

"EHH!?"

Ririna! What the hell are you doing!

I beg you, don't do anything that'll pull me down too!

My stomach started to really hurt.

It looks like this year is going to be really troublesome.

CHAPTER 58

Matsuo Bashou was the most famous poet of the Edo period in Japan.

Bashou was born in 1644, near Ueno, in Iga Province. A place famous for him, and ninjas. There's a rumor that the famed haiku poet Matsuo Bashou wasn't just a master of poetry, but a master of the art of Ninjutsu, the art of stealth, subterfuge and spying. The art of the Ninja!

So was Matsuo Bashou just a wandering master poet, or was he a master spy? During the cautious years of the early Edo, or Tokugawa period, people were not permitted to travel freely around the country, however Bashou managed to obtain permission. His position as a celebrated poet gained him a close access to the nobility. He was able to enter castles and palaces, view the estates of the lords and spend time chatting with them. Speaking directly to the various lords, he would have been able to discover their hidden thoughts as they composed poems together. Wonderful opportunities for intelligence gathering.

It took no time at all to hear about Ririna from a friend in Kaburagi's class.

"Yes, that girl *has* been loitering about Emperor recently. Ah-, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to badmouth your cousin."

"No, you are right. I should be apologising to you on her behalf."

I see. So everybody's been careful not to badmouth a relative of mine in front of my eyes.

Please just give me a break, Ririna~

“Well, could I ask what she does, specifically?”

“Well, things like calling out to him, or sometimes even coming to our classroom. She hasn’t done anything too eye-catching quite yet though.”

It’s plenty already. The thing that the female upperclassmen hate the most is a first year girl following about upperclassmen boys.

Even in my old life, the relationships between females was in a strict grade-based hierarchy. If you didn’t greet them in the hallway, they would say stuff about you “getting ahead of yourself”. I guess when you’re at that age, you start to want to act like you’re a senpai.

For girls of that age, if a younger girl starts making eyes at a boy in their grade, the girl’s name immediately spreads throughout the grade and every girl becomes their enemy.

It’s really scary when that happens, you know. The more extreme senpai will call you out and lecture you too, you know.

I don’t know if the same thing happens at Suiran, but they should at least be feeling the same way, so I can’t help but worry about Ririna.

Oh, no, rather than worrying about Ririna as a person, I’m just worried that I’ll get into trouble for being her cousin.

“I must warn my cousin as well.”

“Yes. Umm, we don’t really mind, but Tsuruhana-san’s group is...”

Uwah, she’s being targeted by *them*?

My stomach is really hurting.

The last time I spoke to Ririna was when she came over with her parents before I entered Suiran.

That girl has always hated me. But I guess that goes the same for me.

But even though she always used to go “Taka-niisama” “Taka-niisama” when the heck did she turn into an Emperor fan.

And it’s Kaburagi, of all people. Even Enjou would have been better. It’s like a landmine around that guy. Things are going to get bad if she carelessly approaches him.

I could already envision a future where my slowly heaped efforts and reputation were being smashed to pieces by Ririna.

I see. So there was this kind of problem too.

Even if I try my best not to incur Emperor’s displeasure, and even if I stop Otousama’s dishonesties, there’s still the plot device of having my relatives do something instead. Guilt by association is truly terrifying.

Ririna is selfish and high-handed and spoilt by her parents, so she’s like a miniature version of Kimidol’s Kisshouin Reika, after all.

What do I do, what do I do? I definitely don’t have the skill to rehabilitate that girl!

But, I did at least give her a phone call to give her a few words.

“Ririna-san, I hear that you have been following Kaburagi-sama about? I think it might be better if you abstained from bothering your upperclassmen.”

“My. Whatever I do should be my own business. And Kaburagi-sama has never really said that I bother him.”

And the moment he does say it will be your last.

“But,”

“More importantly, Reika-san. I want to have a look at the Pivoine salon. Take me there.”

This little!

“The Pivoine is off-limits to Externals. And not ‘more importantly’, we were talking about Kaburagi-sama. You have a terrible reputation amongst the girls in the higher grades, you know.”

“Hmph. So? I’m not scared. Aren’t *you* just jealous that I’m getting close to Kaburagi-sama?”

НАННН?!

“Ririna-san, Suiran has its own rules. If you ignore them, you will be crushed.”

“Yes, yes, got it, got it. Goodness, Reika-oneesama.”

She hung up.

...Annoying. Annoying, annoying, ANNOYINGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGG!!!

What's with her attitude! Somebody was calling her because they were worried! Or rather, you're going to bother *me* so stop it already!

GAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH! ANNOYING!

I suppose people do say that every family has its annoying members. Ririna is so tiring to handle.

If I ask Oniisama to help, I think even *she'll* behave a little, but Oniisama is busy with work and studies, so he doesn't have the time for this. I don't want him to have to deal with something so bothersome.

But is it even possible for me to stop her?!

UGAHHHHHHHHHHHHH! The stress is building up!

I opened up a packet of You Can't Stop, You Won't Stops that I had hidden in my closet, and began devouring them by the clawful.



If I get fat because of that girl, I won't forget!

This year's excursion was to a mountain temple. Why a temple?

After we got on a bullet train and bus, there was a long, long staircase. You're telling me to climb this?

Because I heard it was a temple, I let my guard down. Isn't this exactly the same as last year's mountain climbing hell?

But before long, my calves started acting up. My body is slanting forward. Somebody, somebody please bring me a cane.

While wheezing just like last year, I saw Tsuruhana-san's group snickering at me as they passed me by. I didn't know what to say.

Apparently this temple was a temple featured in a famous haiku by Matsuo Bashou. Bashou climbed this horrifying mountain too? That theory about him being a ninja might actually be true.

O Heavens, please sever my inauspicious connections. I have many of them. Ririna, Kaburagi, Enjou, Tsuruhana...

Names kept coming out. Thanks to that, my heart was pitch-black. Making a pilgrimage with such a negative mindset, will the gods even grant me a miracle?

After somehow making it to the top, it was already time to descend. WHY!? Apparently they were waiting for us. I'm sorry...

After that, they took us to have a stroll around the Five Coloured Swamps Goshiki-numa, a collection of five multicoloured volcanic swamps.



But once I saw the boats on the swamps, my mood suddenly shot up. I want to ride one! I want to row one!

I invited my friends, and quickly got on one.

It's not moving. Even though I'm desperately rowing, why isn't it moving. I just keep spinning around on the spot. What's going on here?

Unable to watch any longer, one of my friends took over the rowing for me. Thank you, Ayame-chan.

It felt great sitting on the boat as it smoothly glided through the water. When I looked around, suddenly there were boats with couples on them! When!?

Before my eyes was a smiling girl. No, I'm thankful that you're rowing for me. But even I wanted to try a boat ride with a boy...

But looking carefully, Kaburagi and Enjou were on a boat together. Two guys, riding a boat together...? Upfpftpft...

I'll just consider it a good thing that I'm with my friends.

By the time I got home, I gradually started feeling the muscle pains. Aahh, tomorrow is going to be rough...

Ah! I forgot to try the Tama Konnyaku!



Tamakonnnyaku. Konnyaku is a specialty of Fukushima, where Reika most likely visited.

CHAPTER 59

Apparently Ririna completely ignored my warning, and continued trying to get close to Kaburagi. But apparently the upperclassmen girls were like a wall and things didn't go as she wanted.

Anyway, thanks to that, I lost my composure and spoke to a first year Pivoine girl in Ririna's class.

When I asked her,

"Is Ririna causing you trouble?" she answered, "Not at all," but expression told a completely different story. So I told her "I'm so sorry. I will speak to her later," and apologised.

The girl was flustered that I was apologising to her, but I asked her to immediately tell me if Ririna was causing problems. Anyway, if she's doing crazy stuff where I can't see her, I need to know.

Once time when I was heading to the salon, she ambushed me and pestered me to take her along. I told her that I couldn't but she wouldn't listen. Thankfully, Aira-sama happened to be walking past, and she gently persuaded her.

Later on she called me and asked, "Who was that wonderful person!?"

In the end, I heard from her that her mother was originally a Pivoine member, and as a child she talked to her about it. She claimed that if she lived close to the primary school, she would "Definitely have gotten in!"

But well, even if she told me that, the reality was that she entered as an External from middle school, so she was disqualified from it. The rules are the rules.

Apparently her conceit is coming from the misconception that she's actually Pivoine as well.

What an idiot.

Later, Tsuruhana-san told me sarcastically, "What a cute cousin you have." I couldn't

find anything to say.

I think my stress is hitting its peak.

And so, I've come to a fast food place.

I haven't entered before out of fear that somebody would see me, but I don't care anymore.

With all my stress, I have to eat, or else!

I ordered my first fast food since being born in this world with a pounding heart. I asked for a cheeseburger, and a large chips. For my drink, I went with oolong tea.

Just in case, I sat in the corner. And I felt a little out of place too.

I took a bite of my cheeseburger. Uwah, so nostalgic! I remember this taste!

A ketchup covered meat patty, with pickles, onion and cheese! What a cheap taste!

Maybe because I'm always eating good food, I was a little shocked at how it tasted even cheaper than I remembered, but I guess that's fast food for you.

The chips are so yummyy. There's heaps of ketchup too.

It felt like the more I filled my stomach, the more the stress melted away. Hahh, I'm so glad I came.

But I wonder what I should do about Ririna.

Thinking about it carefully, she has similar tastes in men to me.

We love Oniisama, but then as a romantic partner, we go for the complete opposites to him, Tomoe-senpai and Kaburagi. We admire Aira-sama as well. Uwahh, I really don't wanna be similar to her.

But then I used to loiter about Tomoe-senpai as well, didn't I.

Earlier, I apologised to Aira-sama. She gently consoled me, telling me "You have it rough, don't you, Reika-chan. If there's anything I can do to help, just tell me," but I absolutely couldn't bring myself to trouble her like that.

As for Kaburagi, I'm so scared that I can't look him in the eye anymore. Just imagining how angry he must be gives me the shakes. But I guess maybe I really should gather my courage and apologise once?

Aahh~ Why did that girl have to make it into Suiran?

I gulped down the watery tea.

Maybe because of what Aira-sama said, Ririna didn't try and push her way into the salon anymore.

But she was still following Kaburagi as usual.

Even my group was starting to really frown. This is bad... At this rate, my position is in danger.

When I said "I'm really sorry," they said "It isn't your fault, Reika-sama," but I doubt they'll be saying that forever.

Lately, my stomach has been hurting often since 1st period.

I can't go without stomach medicine. It hurts too much now.

Should I just flip out?

One day, Ririna finally angered Kaburagi.

While he was seeing Yurie-sama off, she tried to get close to the two and speak to them. It's a rule amongst his followers that they should never approach Kaburagi when he's with Yurie-sama, and especially not get in his way, but Ririna ignored it.

Kaburagi is fundamentally indifferent to the noisy girls around him. No matter what they do, he pays them no attention. But when it involves Yurie-sama, it's a different matter.

When it comes to those who interrupt his precious time with Yurie-sama, he takes off the mask of indifference he usually wears, and shows his emotions.

It's because they know this that the girls around him will never approach him at these times.

But did Ririna *not* know that? Since the other nuisances weren't here this time, she ran over to Kaburagi like it was her chance, just as he was trying to get into a car.

And even though Yurie-sama needed to go to prep school, she ignored the atmosphere and tried to hold them back, so Kaburagi snapped.

He shouted "Cut it out! Never come near me again!" and left Ririna standing there, before riding off with Yurie-sama trying to calm him down.

When I heard all this from Ririna on the phone, I felt dizzy. What the heck had she done...

She asked me to do something about it, but what can I possibly do.

The person himself said not to come near him, so I warned her to learn from her mistake and just give up, but apparently she hadn't given up yet.

Somebody save me.

The rumour that Ririna angered him spread in an instant, and I was having trouble keeping my chest high anymore.

Sometimes there are girls that anger him by kicking up too much of a fuss, and it never becomes too big of a deal though.

Still, the stares from Tsuruhana-san's group are really uncomfortable.

When I went to the Pivoine, I found Kaburagi and Enjou there, so I braced myself and went to apologise.

"It seems that my cousin caused you problems yesterday. I am truly sorry."

I said, and bowed.

There were other people in the salon, but it wasn't the time to worry about how I looked.

After staying quiet for a while, Kaburagi gave a huge sigh and said,

"It's fine."

Really?

"It's not really your fault or anything."

"But she is my cousin."

“Then do something about it.”

“I have been trying to do something about it, but...”

“You’re pretty useless.”

Kaburagi chuckled at me.

It looks like he’s not angry anymore. Thank goodness.

Feeling relieved, just as I was thinking that I would help myself to some tea, somebody dropped the bombshell,

“Your cousin is here looking for you.”

I headed for the hallway in a panic and found Ririna talking about wanting to directly apologise, and asking me to get him to meet her.

Just how stupid is this girl!?

Anyway, even when I told her to leave, she just dragged things out and kept talking.

After we continued that countless times, the door to the salon opened, and Enjou appeared.

“Hey, you should really cut this out already. If you anger Masaya any more than this, I don’t know what’ll happen to you, okay? I bet you don’t know that your cousin, Kisshouin-san, has been lowering her head to various people for your sake. After all, if you did, you wouldn’t be doing something so shameless, right? The reason that you’re still fine after making so many enemies out of the upperclassmen is because Kisshouin-san has been doing nothing but apologising for your sake. It’s because Masaya knows this that he’s stayed quiet all this time. But even that’s coming to an end.”

Enjou pierced Ririna with a cold gaze.

When a normally gentle person turns angry, it's really, really scary.

Speaking of which, the manga Enjou got angry like this a few times too, when it came to Kisshouin Reika.

Ririna turned bright red, and then ran off like she was escaping.

At least say goodbye, dammit.

“Umm, I am truly sorry for this. I even bothered you, Enjou-sama.”

“She was bothering us as well. I thought it was about time to do something.”

“Is that so.”

Ririna, you were really on the brink, you know.

“But Kisshouin-san, this means that you owe me one.”

“Heh?”

“It can't be that you thought I was helping you for free? You're really naïve, huh.”

Enjou gave a sweet smile and before he headed back in, he left me the words,

“I'll be collecting my debt one day, so don't forget, okay?”

EEEEEEHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!?

CHAPTER 60

I was struck by a craving for cup ramen.

To begin with, I don't even eat real ramen. At the Chinese restaurants that my family goes to, at best they have high class soup noodles.

What I want is miso ramen with lots of bean sprouts and corn!

But the hurdle for this is probably higher than the one for fast food, isn't it.

If some middle school girl went to get ramen on her own, she'd stand out heaps after all.

So I thought that I could just compromise and eat cup ramen, but then it would probably stink up my room and expose me, and I wouldn't know what to do with the remaining rubbish either. As for packet ramen, you need to drain the first batch of water after cooking the noodles, and if I messed about in the kitchen, they'd catch me for sure.

But I really wanna eat it...

Or so I was thinking, when a marvellous idea struck me like lightning.

I had dried noodle snacks in my closet.



Baby Ramen

If I put them in hot water, wouldn't they be like instant ramen?

So I immediately went to get a mug of hot water.

I placed the baby ramen into the mug. Then I waited. I stirred it up with a fork.

Itadakimasu.

...Bland.

Eh-, what the-? This isn't yummy at all. The taste of the broth is like a few drops of soy sauce in a bucket of water, and the ramen noodles are just all squishy.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. I even wasted one of my precious few snacks.

But it's a waste to throw it out, and I need to dispose of the evidence too, so I'll just force it all down. If I don't hurry, it's going to swell up and become even bigger. What a terrifying food!

That night I learnt that making strange modifications to ready-made food is never a good thing.

Since that time with Enjou, Ririna stopped hanging about Kaburagi, and even stopped making a fuss about entering the Pivoine too. I'm thankful to Enjou.

Still, if you asked me if she became completely obedient, that's not the case either. She was high-handed as always around the first years, apparently.

But well, if she suddenly became like a different person, that would be even more worrying, so I guess this is just right. I feel bad for her cohort though.

Once, I quietly went to see how she was in class, and when I found that all her underlings were quiet-looking girls, my heart really hurt.

But with Ririna's rampage settled, and some semblance of peace back in my life, both my stomach pains and gluttony were cured. Thank goodness.

If I continued eating the way I did, I'd turn into a baby tanuki again, you know?

Also, there's the matter of my 'debt' with Enjou, but he hasn't come to talk about it at all. How disquieting. Was it a joke, maybe? No, I doubt it.

My mum from my old life would always go on and on about how I should never be in

debt, so I wish he would just hurry up and collect it already.

Anyway, while I spent my days like that, one day a notification for “Summer Camp” came.

It was going to be held at a health resort linked to Suiran, and would be held for three days and two nights.

Last year I couldn’t participate because of my remedials, but this year I want to join in if I can!

Only, even though it seems so fun, apparently not many people participate. None of the girls around me seemed to have any interest either?

Why? I asked, only to find out that everybody else had their own plans over the summer, or they hated being woken up early, or that they didn’t think there was anything fun about going to some plateau in the middle of nowhere.

Yeah... I don’t suppose it *would* hold much appeal to a bunch of rich boys and rich girls. But I want to try it.

When I got home, I immediately told my parents my intentions.

But Okaasama didn’t look very happy to hear it. She gave me reasons like, “A daughter of the Kisshouin family, participating in such a plebeian event?” and “Your skin will burn,” and “Reika-san, you would never be able to handle such a Spartan lifestyle”.

Even if you call it a ‘Spartan lifestyle,’ it’s a *Suiran* Summer Camp so the health resort is on par with a hotel. Not only that, all of the cooking preparations and cleaning is handled by the staff, so it’s really nothing more than a holiday.

But maybe there are so few people who participate because the mainstream view is the same as Okaasama’s? Speaking of which, I never heard about Oniisama going to Summer Camp either.

But I wanted to go no matter what, so I begged her and somehow got permission.

When I handed my application form to Sensei, she seemed incredibly shocked that I was participating. Is it really that minor an event?

But it's true that none of the girls in my group were participating at all. And once I realised that, I started to feel a little nervous. What am I gunna do if it ends up as a repeat of last year's remedials?

Whether or not she knew what I was thinking about, Sensei immediately said "Then please be the leader for the girls!"

Eehhh.

"This is my first time participating, so perhaps I am not the most suited to be leader..."

"It's fine! I believe in you, Kisshouin-san!"

In the end she forced it on me, and I once again ended up as the odd-jobs person. Aaah~

And I found out that the leader of the boys was the maidenly Class Rep.

Long time no see, Class Rep.

"You're participating in the Summer Camp, Reika-san!?"

"Yes. They say that everything is an experience."

"I see. But if you're the leader of the girls, I can really rest easy. I'll be in your care."

"And I in yours."

When I checked the itinerary, I found 'barbeque' and 'fireworks' written. This is it! This is what I've been waiting for! This so-called 'plebeian event'!

I've always wanted to play with fireworks, but I never did have a chance. I'm so looking forward to it.

And given how pleb-like and minor this event is, naturally that duo won't be participating, and neither will those gyarus.

Aahh, I think I'll *fiinally* be able to relax a little!

I was so excited that I even began packing, even though it was still far into the future. Because Okaasama has been so noisy about it, I made sure to pack sunscreen. Insect repellent spray, to torches, to medicine, to emergency rations. Also, hmmm, maybe a bell and flute too...? Or so I thought as I crammed stuff in, and I ended up with an unthinkably huge luggage for a two-night trip.

If it's only 3 days and 2 nights, I wouldn't even need a suitcase, would I.

But I don't know what to take out. Should I just send it there?

Ahh, I'm so looking forward to this!

To clarify, a health resort or 保養所(hoyoujo) is sort of like a lodge or resort-type thing that major companies have, and is used for training camps and recreation camps (often for relaxation and bonding).

Suiran is obviously not a company, but the term literally means 'recuperation place' so it's probably more in-line with a 'health resort', hence my translation choice.

CHAPTER 61

Summer Camp's finally here.

I cut down on my luggage quite a bit, but my suitcase was still ready to burst. It's weird to be asking this myself, but what on earth did I bring.

When we arrived at the health resort, it turned out to be on the level of a hotel. Even our rooms were just suites. Rather than a camp, isn't this basically just going on a vacation?

The girl assigned to my room was Nonose Maho-chan from another class. We've basically never spoken, but I wonder if we'll get along. She seems kinda nervous though.

After resting in our room for a while, we had a barbecue in the hotel garden. All of the ingredients were prepared in advance, so all we had to do was roast them and eat.

Since I'm still technically the leader of the girls, I went with Class Rep to check if everyone had cutlery and a drink. But well, there were full-time staff there, so it was just for show.

Still, this is my first time eating barbecue in this life. It's a lot more extravagant than I remember it being though.

Ooh! They have roast corn!



Oh my, but they don't have yakisoba.



I wanted some yaki'ika too.



What a shame.

Since it's a Suiran-style barbecue, it feels more like a refined lunch than what I had in mind, but this kind of thing is fun too.

I decided to try casually sitting next to Nonose-san. None of my group came, so today has been a total away game for me.

I'll act low key and mix in with them.

"I never thought that you of all people would be coming, Reika-sama."

"I was surprised too, Reika-sama."

"Truly? But I have always wanted to try it at least once."

“You didn’t last year, right?”

Because last year I was stuck in remedial hell.

“Did all of you participate last year as well?”

“This year is my first time.”

“This is my second.”

Over half of the girls here turned out to be first timers. Thank goodness.

“By the way, tomorrow is going to be hiking. Are you going to be all right, Reika-sama?”

Uu-, that’s what I’m most worried about. According to the itinerary it’s only going to be a two-hour walk, but I wonder if I’ll really be able to follow.

“I shall do my best,”

I declared with clenched fists.

After the barbecue was a short ceramics course. I used the manual potters wheel, but mine turned out a little warped. I’m just really no good with my hands, am I. Well, whatever.

Once night fell, after dinner was the fireworks event I’d been waiting for!

Perhaps because watching fireworks isn’t something that upper class think is suitable, I’ve never had a chance all this time.

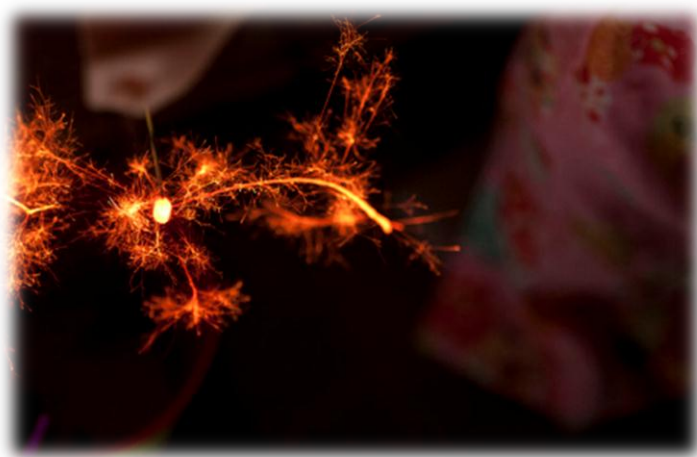
But just the smell of fireworks really brings summer to mind, doesn’t it. Today we only had handheld fireworks, so there was nothing like a rocket firework or one of those dragon things though. When I was a kid, those mouse fireworks really scared me

because you could never tell which way they would fly.

Speaking of which, what on earth do people find fun about those snake fireworks. All they do is grow.

I never understood it back then, and I still don't understand it now. The fact that they're still selling them means that people are buying them, right? Hmmm. Anyway, since Class Rep was playing with hanging sparkler fireworks a little further away, I decided to come closer.

“So you chose hanging sparklers? You would not prefer something flashier?”



“I really like these ones.”

Hmm~ As expected of Class Rep, the maiden.

“It seems that Honda-san has not come,”

I whispered, just loudly enough for him to hear.

In shock, the ember of the sparkler dropped to the ground.

“She even came last year, so why...”

“I see. You did not end up in her class either, this year. Have things progressed since last time?”

He shook his head.

“What should I do, Kisshouin-san?”

“What, you ask? Could you not simply confess?”

“That’s impossible. If I got rejected, my whole school life would be over.”

“It might go well though.”

“But Honda-san’s type is Enjou-kun.”

Class Rep began sulking.

“Given that she was class representative with him last year, perhaps she may have changed her mind after all the hardships she surely faced.”

“...Kisshouin-san, could you go ask her for me?”

“We are in different classes, so that may prove to be difficult.”

At any rate, everyone finished playing with fireworks while the two of us spoke, and began to tidy up.

After the firework event ended, I returned to my room and then took turns in the bath with Nonose-san.

To tell you the truth, I actually got a light perm as per Okaasama’s instructions. I really

wonder just how fixated she is on this stuff, but well, can't be helped.

Anyway, as long as I followed the existing bends, it was possible to fashion some decent curls.

Although, I didn't really want people to know about the perm, so I made sure to dry my hair properly.

"Reika-sama. I find it hard to sleep with the lights on, so would it be possible to turn them off?"

"Certainly. Well then, let us turn off the lights."

I brought some playing cards too, but it looks like there was no time to play them. I wonder if I'll get to tomorrow.

Anyway, time to turn off the lights and go to sleep.

I was woken up early in the morning and after being made to exercise amongst nature, we finally had breakfast. I'm not so good with mornings, so it was pretty tough.

Since we're hiking today, I made sure to put on sunscreen and a hat.

My rucksack feels so heavy... I'm starting to regret coming here a little.

Before long, the hiking finally began. It was a fairly gentle incline so I thought it would be fine, but it just kept going, and going, and it didn't take long for my will to break.

And not only that, none of my other soft friends were here. I was now undeniably the last one. The leader of the girls was the last one. Argh, it hurts. I wanna go home.

Nonose-san stuck with me to cheer me on. I'm really being treated like extra baggage now. I wanna cry.

After two hours, I somehow made it to the top. I got to enjoy cold milk and lunch here. Since I was close to collapse, Nonose-san acted as leader in my place. I really felt bad about it.

On the way back to the hotel, with the heavy rucksack on my back, I thought to myself,

I probably won't be going next year...

Perhaps because of my exertions at lunchtime, at the stargazing event after dinner, the teacher's explanations felt like a lullaby to me.

Thanks to that, I immediately had a bath when we got back, and slept right afterwards.

And then I woke up in the middle of the night.

...I'm hungry.

I was too tired to really have an appetite. Thanks to that I didn't eat much at dinner, did I. I might not be able to go back to sleep like this.

But if I remember right, I brought some crunchy ume plums, didn't I. Maybe I'll eat those.



Since Nonose-san can't sleep with the lights on, I put on a white cardigan and brought the pickled ume with me into the hallway.

Before I began eating, I found a dim staircase landing in a corner, and sat there so that I wouldn't be seen.

They were covered with honey and sweet, which made them easy to eat. Crunch crunch, crunch crunch...

“KYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!”

Eh-?

I heard the nearby scream of a girl, and then the sound of somebody running away. Since I didn't want anybody to find out that I had snuck out of my room to snack, I rushed back into my room in a panic.

Stripping off the cardigan, I tossed it ume and all into my bag to remove the evidence. As Nonose-san got up, I was all like '*Uh, yeah, I just got up as well,*' so we left our room together to see what was going on.

Oh gosh, my bed hair is terrible. I guess this is because I didn't dry my hair properly before crashing. I'll tidy it up with my fingers.

"Whatever is the matter?"

"I don't know either."

Only girls stayed on this floor. As everybody left their rooms to see what was happening, one of the girls suddenly screamed,

"Over there on that staircase, there was this ghost and it was gobbling on bloody flesh!"

The moment the other girls heard this, they flew into a huge panic, screaming ghosts and goblins, and in an instant the whole place turned into pandemonium.

Uh, could it be that she was talking about me? It's true that my hair is a bit of a mess right now, and I was definitely eating red ume plums, but I wasn't gobbling anything, okay...

Apparently the one who spotted me was Occult-san. Occult-san woke up thirsty so she went to get a drink apparently. And then she apparently met a ghost.

And so she started saying stuff like *“I have a **sixth sense**.”* and *“There’s a dark presence on that staircase.”* and *“Her face was just filled with hatred.”* and before I knew it, some other girls started saying *“Now that I think about it, I got a bad feeling too.”* and *“For some reason I haven’t been able to stop shivering for a while now.”* and started to agree with her too. What do I do...

After all this time, there’s no way I can tell them that it was me. If I tell them that I snuck out to have a snack, they’re definitely going to think I’m some huge glutton. I feel really bad about slandering the hotel with ghost rumours, but I care even more about protecting myself, okay~

While I prayed that I wouldn’t be busted, Nonose-san and the others came up to me and said,

“It’s okay, Reika-sama. As long as we’re all together, there’s nothing to be afraid of.”

“Right. You don’t need to be so frightened.”

and tried to encourage me. Guh-... my chest hurts!

“Thank you, everyone.”

I’m sorry. I won’t come next year, okay...?

And so the whole ghost ruckus continued until the next morning. With the crunchy ume plums hidden deep in my bag, and with my hair curled to perfection, I set out for home.

CHAPTER 62

Term 2 is busy.

Right after the Athletics Carnival is the School Festival.

As usual, I only participated in the events where I wouldn't hold back my class.

On the other hand, all the gyaru-type girls eagerly signed up for the relays.

Speaking of which, Mochida-san ended up bullied last year because she messed up during the Athletics Carnival, didn't she.

Well, I doubt that even I would end up bullied, but I'd better be careful regardless.

Enjou signed on for the relays, but apparently not the cavalry battle. How surprising.

I would've thought he'd be as excited for it as the Emperor.

But thinking about it, I didn't see him in it last year either. Although if he did join, everyone would be even more excited, wouldn't they.

When I told him this, he replied with a laugh,

"Unlike Masaya, I don't really have much zeal for the cavalry battle. When I see him all eager from up close, it really makes me want to avoid it."

Eventually we decided that the sacrifices would be chosen by rock-paper-scissors, and the unlucky candidates would try to increase their meagre chances of survival through training. It was around that time that Enjou dropped the bombshell,

"Apparently he's been really frustrated ever since that close game with the Stuco President last year. He's even reading books on war strategy now,"

sending the already depressed boys into further depression. Thank goodness I was born a girl.

As usual, the girls were drunk on Enjou during practice, so I encouraged them to cheer

for the other boys a little more. Those guys are working hard for our class too, so the earlier treatment was a little too pitiful.

I've never been in either of their classes before, so I was shocked by the fervour. I remember my peaceful days last year. How nostalgic.

But apparently my class isn't even that bad. Maiden Class Rep who's in Kaburagi's class already looks exhausted, and the Athletics Carnival hasn't even started yet. And with the girls cheering for Kaburagi in stuff like the baton relays too, all the boys competing with him were being pressured like crazy. I'd hate to be in their place.

Thank goodness Enjou isn't the hot-blooded type...

In the end, an External from the Student Council survived to the end, but now that Kaburagi had learnt war strategy as well, he wasn't a match for him.

I wonder if Kaburagi is going to try even harder for next year. Well, good luck, Silver Hair-kun.

After the Athletics Carnival was the midterms. And after the midterms was the Cultural Festival. So busy.

It was only optional for classes to get involved, but apparently mine was. There were the options for a haunted house or a refreshment booth, but to begin with, none of these kids had ever had takoyaki or pancakes or the like, so we couldn't come up with any good ideas.

Somebody suggested a café as well, but all the girls were like, "but it's *our* Enjou-sama" and quickly shut down the possibility of him being taken by girls in other classes.

In the end, that only left a handmade candle store.

Together, we made stuff like aromatic candles, gel candles, mosaic candles, flower candles, just lots of candles.

Nobody was ever thinking of making a profit, so we used all sorts of good materials and I think we ended up with fairly good products considering a bunch of middle schoolers made them.

Enjou's candles already have preorders.

I got involved too, and melted hot wax to make small flower-shaped candles.

They had some pink to them, and were pretty cute. I mixed some blended aroma oils in as well. Isn't this pretty good for something Reika-made?

Before long, some of the girls started mixing in perfumes and stuff too, and because there were so many smells in the classroom, some people started complaining of headaches and we had to ventilate the area.

Once we all finished our quotas, we were ready for the day of the Cultural Festival. Apparently we sold quite well.

The customers were people like other students, fathers, brothers, "old girl" alumni as well. To prevent crime, Suiran's guests are carefully selected, so most of the people who came were relatives and the like.

Eventually people started bidding for the Enjou candles but since the prices skyrocketed—which was ridiculous for candles—that was eventually put a stop to, and there was a lottery instead.

When I nervously glanced over to see how my candles were selling, I gave a quiet sigh of relief when I saw that a few people had bought some. What was shocking though was that one of them was Ririna, who had brought along her underlings too.

Since we only needed a few people there to take care of the sales, everybody else went to other classes, or their clubs, or just the refreshment booths and exhibits.

I decided to tour the place with my friends as well.

Since we didn't know where to start, we sat down in a café with high class French tea and helped ourselves to cookies and tea as we read a pamphlet.

Wow. There's a bunch. They're all pretty plain though.

It was all stuff like flower arrangement exhibitions that only middle-aged women would go to.

In the end we all decided to give everywhere a once over, and maybe see what was most popular.

When we walked past the literature club, I remembered that Class Rep was in it, so I

decided to go in and have a look.

It was stuff like book reviews, or student-written novels, haikus and poems.

As I was having a casual look through them, my eyes became nailed to something shocking.

On a light blue postcard with a drawing of the sea were the words,

“My ashen grey world was painted with vivid colours. I see. So I’ve fallen in love.”

CLAAAAAAASSS REPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPP!!!!!!

Class Rep, what the heck are you doing! Are you okay!? What went through your head!?

His name was written clearly underneath the love poem.

I was so shocked that I staggered.

I-, I see. So this is what people meant by “that incurable illness that you contract in eighth grade”.

Class Rep, you sure are bold for a guy who couldn’t even confess.

So after talking about how you were afraid of being rejected, you go and announce your unrequited love to the masses?

Is he tired? It must have been rough taking care of the Kaburagi class through both the Athletics Carnival and Cultural Festival.

“My, isn’t this that Class Rep’s entry? He fell in love!? With whom!?”

“That serious-looking Class Rep huh~”

“How shocking... Does anybody have any idea which girl it is?”

My friends began growing noisy. My heart was noisy too.

Class Rep. I really admire your courage. So go use that courage to freaking confess already.

With just this, I really don't think Miharuchan is going to realise, you know...?

Or could it be that you never meant to let her know to begin with? Did you just want to express your poet's soul?

Aaah, Class Rep... You really gave a shock to little old me.

CHAPTER 63

1) First, on Valentines in Japan, women are supposed to give chocolates to guys. Sometimes it's out of courtesy (obligatory chocolates/giri choco) and sometimes an expensive or homemade one for the person you actually like (forrealz chocolates/honmei choco). It's also not too weird to give them to friends as a sign of affection (friend-chocolates/tomochoco).

Don't ask why. It's some marketing thing, like how people buy diamond rings for weddings now.

2) Shimazaki Touson is the pen-name of Shimazaki Haruki, a Japanese author, active in the Meiji, Taishou and early Shouwa periods of Japan. He began his career as a romantic poet, but went on to establish himself as a major proponent of naturalism in Japanese fiction.

First Love

When I saw you under the apple tree
With your hair swept up for the first time
I thought you were the flower
In the flower comb you wore in front

When you gently extended your soft white hand
And gave me an apple
It was the very first time I loved someone
With the pale red of the autumn fruit

When my sigh unknowingly
Passed through the threads of your hair
I drank of your passion
From the cup of my tender love

The narrow, natural path
Under the trees in the apple grove
Who first trod this path?
Whose steps left the first traces?
You asked, you lovely, I thought

Taken from the Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature

Now that Aira-sama and Yurie-sama had gained entry into the schools they wanted to join, all that was left was waiting for their graduation.

Since Yurie-sama won't be coming to the salon once she graduates, Kaburagi has been secretly depressed under his mask of composure. It seems that he was hit pretty hard by the even greater difficulty of a middle schooler dating a university student. But no matter how hard you try, you can't really do anything about an age gap.

I heard from Aira-sama that Yurie-sama was spending more time around him out of consideration.

Still, on days when Yurie-sama is too busy to come, Kaburagi just sighs as he looks out the window.

I wonder if he's going to start writing poems again. Maybe I should teach him flower divination.

Ah, and I also know a good matchmaker shrine, okay? The fortunes are really accurate. You should go too, Kaburagi-sama.

Speaking of poems, Class Rep made no progress at all despite his daring show of his love.

I had been sure that he would confess after that, but since he showed no signs of it, I went and asked him. He replied that he was too embarrassed to try.

I really don't get how this guy's criteria for embarrassment...

Thinking this, I asked him why he did such a thing... and he replied that he was influenced by Shimazaki Touson, and had done it before he realised. That disease really is terrifying.

Apparently he actually wanted Miharu-chan to realise his feelings through that poem. You think that because 'Miharu(美波留)' has 'waves(波)' in it, she'd realise because you drew a picture of a sea? Who the heck would!

If you were in the same class and were close to begin with, then sure, maybe, but if she

thought it was her in *this* situation, that would just make her a total narcissist.

In the end he asked me for advice on his next moves, so I suggested that he give her Valentine's chocolate. In the end I guess he really liked the whole 'reverse Valentine's chocolate' idea because he went and prepared something expensive.

Not only that, but apparently he was too embarrassed to give it to her, so he came and asked me to do it instead. Just how much of a maiden are you.

I even told him to at least include a card with a message or something, but in the end he didn't have the courage for that either. *This* would have been the time to use the poem. Hm, or maybe follow Touson's example and draw a picture of an apple or something?

In the end, for some reason I ended up giving it to Miharuchan as a friend-chocolate. She was surprised at the sudden gift, but I was troubled too, okay. I just gave an obviously passion-filled chocolate to a girl I'm not even that close with. What if she misunderstands me and weird rumours spread.

Well, she actually did misunderstand, but in a completely different way. Somehow the story in her mind became one where I actually had somebody I really liked, but gave the chocolate to her because I lacked the courage to confess.

Miharuchan looked at me with understanding and nodded, "Try your best next year, okay?" in a completely unnecessary consolation.

How are you going to take responsibility for this, Class Rep!

And now Miharuchan thinks I like someone!

As for Class Rep, he was incredibly moved when I passed her White Day present onto him.

I'm getting the feeling that he's transforming further and further into a maiden. I wonder if I can start treating him like a girlfriend already.

One day, I received a bit of news from Serika-chan about Tsuruhana-san.

"Tsuruhana-san got ear piercings."

“Eh-”

Piercings in middle school!? What a delinquent!

Isn't that forbidden by the school regulations? Ah, well, I guess a drill-hair like me can't speak.

“Some of the other girls have gotten piercings too.”

“Unbelievable. It's unacceptable.”

Kikuno-chan and the other girls started joining in too.

Unlike other schools, Suiran is filled with kids from good families, so image is a huge deal to them. Thanks to that, the school regulations on personal appearance is strict too.

Dyed hair is basically banned. But well, I hear some girls secretly use just a tiny bit so that it looks natural.

And I've got my curled hair too.

But piercings, huhh. I wonder if they'd even do it for a middle schooler without their parents' consent. Does that mean her parents are fine with it?

Or perhaps, surprisingly, she pierced them herself.

If that's the case then she's really bold. Leaving perms and dyes aside, a lot of traditional families frown upon piercings. Okaasama told me that she wouldn't allow it either.

Anyway, Tsuruhana-san's group is getting more and more overbearing. My group is still higher than theirs, but the day that changes might be close.

Serika-chan and the others began a sneaky discussion about whether or not to tattle on them.

I really hope they'd stop. Our group has weak points like my curled hair too.

“Let us watch them for a little longer. I do not think it would be a good idea for us to inform the teachers.”

I somehow managed to calm everyone down, but maybe things are going to get even more heated once we become third years.

Gosh, I'd hate that. For some reason people think of me oddly highly, but I'm actually the first to run when it comes to a cat fight. Girls are scary.

While all this was happening, I heard that Kaburagi attended the high school graduation ceremony with lilies (yuri).

Class Rep, Kaburagi, why are all these guys turning into maidens? I was a little envious. But lilies, huh. Could it be that he saw the time Oniisama brought me uraras, and actually really liked it?

Actually, there was the time when he danced the waltz with Yurie-sama too.

Leaving Oniisama aside, perhaps Kaburagi should become Imari-sama's disciple or something.

The other day, Imari-sama came over for the first time in the while, and he gave me some boxed flowers.



Boxed preserved flowers. Super stylish. Great for Valentine's and Christmas.

So stylish! As expected of Imari-sama!

Kaburagi, apparently men can't stick to just bouquets, like a one trick pony!

Around the time cherry blossoms began to fall in full bloom, we all advanced into third years.

CHAPTER 64

Aahh, it looks like my class-changing luck has finally run dry...

For my final year of middle school, I finally ended up with His Majesty the Emperor.

Serika-chan was in the same class as well, and was jumping for joy about it.

“We’ve finally done it, Reika-sama! We’ve really had such bad luck so far!”

I’ve really had such good luck so far.

“This year is looking so bright! Don’t you think so, Reika-sama?”

Thinking about it, nothing has gone wrong since that bad fortune. Should I go get purified?

I wonder if there’s a famous place for exorcisms.

As I was dragged along to class by the jubilant Serika-chan, along the way we ran into Enjou, who was surrounded by girls.

“Kisshouin-san. Thank goodness. There’s been something I wanted to talk to you about. This is a great chance.”

“Eh-”

The girls around us all began screaming because of his words.

“What are they going to talk about!?”

“It can’t be, a confession!?”

“A love triangle!?”

Stop it! Stop with your strange guesses! How could this black-hearted schemer do something as cute as confessing!

“It’s a bit hard to talk here, so could you come with me?”

His smile placed a huge pressure on me. I can’t fight back with my coward’s heartt!
My senses are tingling and I’m getting a horrible feeling about this! I don’t wanna goo!

But although I screamed that in my heart, I accepted his request with a face filled with composure.

Serika-chan watched with glittering eyes as I was sent to the gallows.

In the end, I was taken to the base of a staircase.

Suspicious. Super suspicious. What part of this smile plastered onto his face is supposed to be trustworthy.

“You see, I actually have a favour to ask of you.”

“A favour?”

“Yeah. You ended up in Masaya’s class, right? Could you become a class rep, please?”

“HAAH?”

Class Rep? Why me! Or rather, just, why!

“You should know already that the girls in Masaya’s class are noisy each year. Since this is the last year of middle school, and a year with a school trip too, I think it’s going to be especially bad. A normal girl won’t be able to handle it. That’s why I thought of you.”

“Eh- ...But why do *you* care?”

Worrying about another class? This guy definitely isn’t doing this because he’s filled with love for the school or anything.

If he was a person like that then shouldn’t he have taken the initiative to become class rep last year?

“Mmmm... The truth is that somebody asked me as a favour. The guy who’s going to be your class rep. Since he didn’t think he’d be able to manage on his own, he was thinking of getting you to act as vice. Apparently your homeroom teacher plans to ask you the same. But you refused last year, didn’t you? That’s why he wanted me to persuade you.”

No way! No way no way!

Just remembering the weary face of last year’s class rep is enough to write the option off forever!

How are you going to take responsibility if I get burdened by stress, go crazy, and start writing poems too!

I’ve already got a previous offence from my last life!

After watching a certain movie I was influenced so badly that I started reading Rimbaud and Verlaine, and I still remember how I wrote crap about sighs and eternity! As I recall, I came back to my senses the next day and should have disposed of it, but did I *actually*? I wouldn’t have just gotten lazy and hidden the notepad in a drawer or something, right?

GYAAAAAAAAAHHH! If my family found it and read it, I wouldn’t be able to rest in peace!

“Kisshouin-san? Are you okay?”

“Eh-, ah, yes. I am fine.”

The past is the past. Forget about it. It's okay. You definitely threw it away.

UWAAAAHH! But I wrote poems in other people's signature books! Scary! Actions that leave evidence are scary!

“Kisshouin-san?”

“I am fine.”

Forget it, Reika! There's nobody who doesn't have a little bit of dark history, okay!
Poems are something that everyone experiences once.

“Well then, become class rep, was it? I must apologise, but I do not believe I have the ability, so could you possibly ask somebody else?”

I don't want to get involved with anything troublesome.

“I see. I guess it can't be helped.”

Enjou showed me a dark smile.

“Say, Kisshouin-san... Don't you still owe me a favour?”

Hah? Favour? Uh, favour... Favour...?

Ah-!

“When Ririna...”

“Yup. Remember it now? I think it’s time to pay your dues.”

You’re bringing up something from over a year ago!?

I thought that expired long ago!

My old mum was right. You definitely can’t get involved with debts. It’ll come back to get you with ridiculous interest!

My new homeroom teacher called me out right after.

Next to him was some boy with a buzzcut like a monk. Is this the culprit?

What on earth have you done, Monk Boy!

“Oh geez, I’m really glad that you agreed, Kisshouin-san. If you’re doing it anyway, how about being the lead rep?”

“No, vice please.”

I’m not good at refusing people, but I’m outright refusing this.

“Um, I’m Bouda(坊田). I’ll be in your care.”

Eh-, the Monk’s(坊主;Bouzu) surname is Monk Field(坊田; Bouda)?

That’s way too fitting.

“Yes, likewise. Please take care of me.”

I’m super unwilling about this, but since I’ve already agreed, it can’t be helped. Let’s get along this year, Monk-kun.

“Bou- ...da-kun, are you close with Enjou-sama? To think you would be able to ask him to persuade me.”

On the way back to the classroom, I voiced the question I had been wondering the whole time.

I can't really picture these two being close.

“Close? Heavens, no. Last year we were in the same class, and he helped me with a lot of things. He's a really amazing person!”

So Monk-kun is in the Enjou Faction. Looks like he looks up to him.

Enjou just looks like a huge villain to me, though.

“Sensei wanted me to be class rep again, but since there's the famous Kaburagi-kun in our class, I thought it was impossible for me. At that time, Enjou-kun had just arrived in the staff room by coincidence, and suggested that you act as the vice rep. If you controlled the girls, then everything would be fine, he said. He even said that he would ask you himself. Enjou-kun is just such a kind guy. He's just so considerate of others, isn't he.”

Enjou was the one who suggested this!? What the. That's completely different to what he told me!

That damned schemer! What the heck are you planning!

With no idea what I was thinking, Monk-kun continued praising him to the skies. Apparently this kid has no eyes for people.

When I returned to the classroom, it was an even bigger fuss than last year's Enjou thing.

A huge group of girls were causing a racket.

Uwahh... Am I really going to be *this* class' vice rep for a whole year?

And everyone seems to have conveniently forgotten, but I'm technically a Pivoine, okay.

Ah-! And Serika-chan was right in the middle of it all. She was in the very best spot!

"It's your turn, Kisshouin-san."

It's impossible for me, Monk-kun...

My stomach should have been healed, but it started feeling weird again.

Having spotted me, the girls all rushed over with excited expressions.

"Reika-sama, what was that talk with Enjou-sama about? Could it have been a confession? Kyaaa! How dreamy!"

My stomach started hurting again.

What were the foods good for the stomach again...?

CHAPTER 65

Kaburagi's female fans have been creating a fuss in class, but never go as far as actually causing trouble for others. They just get really loud during breaks is all. It was just like last year with Enjou.

Except, since Kaburagi's temper has a lower boiling point than Enjou's, they've been probing for his limit as they enjoy being around him.

At a glance, it seems like there's no problem as long as you deal with the noise, but since there are more people in the classroom, sometimes there are kids whose seats get stolen by these girls. So a few timid kids have been having trouble with not being able to sit at their own desks.

What should I do. If I keep warning them every time, they're going to think of me as a nag, and as a class rep, it's not like I can turn a blind eye either.

I wonder what Enjou did last year. I wasn't a class rep, so to be honest I didn't really pay attention to the others.

And I recall Enjou gently chiding them not to invade other people's classrooms.

In Term 1 they really were noisy, but after a while things worked out pretty fine, I think. Well, maybe we just got used to it though.

Still, I'm definitely not going to start managing Kaburagi's fans.

And Monk Boy keeps looking at me with pleading eyes. It's impossible, I tell you.

Tsuruhana-san is in that fan group. I'll create even more conflict if I say something to her.

Aahh, the silent complaints from all those victims are...

Hah, can't be helped.

"Tsuruhana-san, I am sorry to disturb you during your conversation, but it seems that this girl needs her seat back, so could you move?"

"...Hmmm~ Whose seat was this again?"

She looked around the room with a challenging gaze.

The eyes of the seat owner began to swim.

“Hey, could I borrow your seat for a little?”

“Ah... yes, please do. I don’t need it yet...”

Geh-! I’ve been abandoned!

Hey, you can’t do that, okay? It’s because you complained that I came here to say this to her.

“So she says. That fine? Kisshouin-san?”

Tsuruhana-san chuckled.

She’s a real piss-off. But since there’s no victim, I can’t say anything back.

“I see. If the girl herself is fine with that, then I have nothing to say. My apologies for bothering you.”

“It must be rough huhh~ Being class rep.”

I walked away with a smile of composure, somehow managing to hide the stiffness.

Damnniiitt! I lost!

Serika-chan welcomed me back with a disgruntled expression. I’m sorry for being a coward!

This won’t do. That this rate, far from a showdown with between our two groups, I might be overthrown in my own one.

All of this is Kaburagi’s fault! It’s because he’s so irresponsible! Well, I’m aware this is just an excuse though!

Kaburagi was paying no attention to the girls at all, instead talking happily to the boys about sports.

He has no idea how much other people are suffering... Heavens above, please let a bird poop on that guy's head.

Maybe I should just bring some folding chairs into the classroom and set up a Kaburagi Viewing Corner or something.

Lately I've been trying to avoid buying sweets when I go snack shopping at the convenience store.

I'm afraid of getting fat and pimples, you see.

In exchange, I've started eating more onigiri and sandwiches. It's healthier and more nutritious than sweets, you see. It's a shame that it doesn't keep well, though.

I get chauffeured on weekdays, so I secretly do my snack-buying on weekends and during the breaks in cram school.

Lately there have been a lot of new onigiri flavours. But in the end, yakishake grilled salmon is my favourite.

And recently I've been immersing myself in some stupid hobbies to forget about my troublesome school life when I'm at home. Yes, I realise that it's just escapism...

Anyway, for today I've got my 'Convenience Store Onigiri Rankings'.

Right now, I've got yakishake at number 1,



Onigiri made with yakishake grilled salmon

mixed chicken rice at number 2,



*Gomoku Five Ingredients mixed rice typically come with some of the following:
matsutake, shiitake, bamboo shoots, burdock root, fresh soybeans, chestnuts, chicken, fish, or oysters.*

and maybe mentaiko roe at number 3?



*Mentaiko(明太子) is the marinated roe of pollock and cod is a common ingredient in Japanese cuisine.
The taste is salty, spicy, savoury and ocean-like.*

Ah, but the omurice one from the other day was yummy as well.



Omurice in portable form

As I gobbled down my onigiri, I suddenly got a call from Sakura-chan.

“Sakura-chan? What’s the matter?”

“There’s a little something I’d like to ask. Hm? Are you eating something, Reika?”

“I just had fondant chocolate.”

“You’re going to get fat eating that at night, you know.”

“...I’ll be careful. Anyway, what was it you wanted?”

“Oh right! There was this girl who gave Takumi a Valentine’s Chocolate!”

Valentine’s? It’s been a pretty long time since.

“Why are you talking about it now? And who?”

“Becausee! I only just found out today. I heard it from Takumi’s oneesan. The girl is his track and field club kouhai. Do you know her?”

Uh, you didn’t even tell me her name, but no, I don’t know her.

“Isn’t it just obligatory chocolates?”

“Reika. You’re making light of Takumi.”

Ridiculous. It’s true that in primary school he had a cute face like a squirrel, but maybe because of the daily training, since entering middle school I think he’s gotten pretty sharp-looking, okay?

“Find out what kind of girl she is.”

“Mm~mm, if it’s just having a look, I don’t mind. But I’ve got a lot on my hands right now.”

“Exactly what problems do you have?”

I started grumbling to Sakura-chan about my troubles as a class rep.

“Reika, isn’t it because you’re so meek that they’re looking down on you? Go let them have it. And then maybe talk to Emperor too.”

“Eehhh~ I can’t do eiitherr of thosee~”

“Then give up.”

“Uu...”

They’re not causing too much harm right now, so I want to avoid directly confronting them.

“Reika, you have a bad habit of running away and binge eating as stress relief, so you really need to be careful. What about doing yoga? I’m doing yoga at home right now.”

“Yoga, huhh.”

I know the word yoga, but all that comes to mind is Indians in acrobatic poses.

“Yoga calms the heart, you know.”

Eh-, but your heart isn't calm at all. But you're scary, so I'm not going to say that.

Since Sakura-chan gave me some recommendations on yoga DVDs, I guess I'll check them out later. I've gotten pretty sick of hula hooping, so it's good timing I guess.

And maybe I'll even open my third eye?

The next day, I went to have a look at that kouhai as per Sakura-chan's orders.

From what I could see as I peered into her classroom from the hallway, and observed the surroundings, she was a tanned, energetic-looking girl. The complete opposite type to Sakura-chan, the archetype Japanese beauty. Now then, coming here was fine and all, but what do I do after this?

"What are you doing here, Reika-san?"

I jumped at the sudden voice from behind. When I turned around, I found Ririna standing there.

"What are *you* doing here, Ririna?"

"What, you ask? This is my classroom. Could it be that you needed me for something?"

This was Ririna's classroom? Then does that mean she's in the same class as that girl?

"Say, that Toriumi girl. What is she like?"

"Why do you want to know *that*, Reika-san?"

“There are some circumstances.”

“Well apparently, she’s a sports committee member, and her energy is her good point. I’m not all that close to her yet, so I don’t know much more. Do you guys know?”

Ririna started asking her subordinates instead.

Her meek-looking subordinates gave answers like, “I think she’s in the track and field club.” and “She’s cheerful, and has a lot of friends.”

“I see. Thank you. Also, thank you for getting along with Ririna. I hope you will continue to look after her.”

“Why are *you* saying that! It’s none of your business, okay!”

Ririna turned a little red. Hey, if *you* fall, it gets me wrapped up as well, okay?

“More importantly, umm...”

Ririna suddenly grabbed my arm, and brought me further into the hallway away from the others.

“Lately that Tsuruhana-senpai and her friends have been getting bolder towards your group but, are you okay?”

Even Ririna sees it that way?

“I am fine. They have nothing to do with us.”

“Take care, alright? If *you* fall, it gets me wrapped up as well, okay?”

She was thinking the same thing?

This whole thing has turned into something pretty annoying.

Anyway, I messaged Sakura-chan with exactly what I heard from Ririna and her group.

She replied, “I need you to continue your observations.”

Geez, I don’t think you need to worry so much. I’m sure they were obligatory, okay?

CHAPTER 66

Tsuruhana-san has been getting bolder and bolder by the day.

It looks like she doesn't even put me in her eyes anymore.

She and her friends always kick up a huge fuss to gain Kaburagi's attention. Annoying to the extreme. How on earth could Kaburagi hold any interest towards her because of something like this.

And my group's dissatisfaction has only been growing.

A number of times now, the strong-willed Serika-chan and Kikuno-chan have led my group to butt heads with them.

And apparently each time, they'd be mocked "Woww~ These goodie two shoes are soooo scaryyy~" which just angered them more.

"I cannot stand this any longer! They just keep getting noisier and don't reflect on how they're bothering Kaburagi-sama at all! Reika-sama, please say something to them as well!"

"Yeah! Even Tsuruhana-san shouldn't be able to stand up to you, Reika-sama!"

Whoawhoa, I don't have that kind of power, okay? Tsuruhana-san completely looks down on me.

After all, I'm pretty sure when we went on that excursion and she saw me struggling to climb the mountain, she decided that I was nothing to fear.

I really struggled that day. Around the time I was only halfway up the mountain, she and her friends had apparently already been kicking a fuss around Enjou and Kaburagi on the summit.

In the end Kaburagi snapped and yelled "Shut up!" though. And while all this was happening, I was getting the label of 'totally useless' stuck to me.

This is badd...

Isn't there some way to settle things peacefully?

A few days later during a break, somebody stormed into our classroom to yell. It was the new Student Council President.

"Oi, Tsuruhana! Stop barging into other people's classes! You're causing trouble for the students here!"

"Hahh? Who do you think you are, External?"

"I don't want to be told that by vacuum-brains like you. Do as I say and come back. And also, don't think I can't see those piercings through your hair. They're against school regulations. Take them off."

"What did you say!"

Although a group of girls started glaring at him, he showed no signs of budging.

"Don't make me repeat myself. Take out your piercings, and get out of this classroom. We've received a flood of complaints about you."

Maybe they were pressured because he was a whole head taller than them, but they harrumphed and then left.

It felt like the whole room let out a sigh of relief.

My classmates started looking at the President with a gaze of respect.

Yup, as expected of you, Silver-Haired Stuco Pres.

While I was applauding him in my mind, Silver Hair turned my way.

"And do your job as class rep properly."

I got scolded.

Uu, sorry.

Having said all that he needed to, the Student Council President left as well.

“This new Student Council President might be a little cool.”

“Yeah, he’s so manly. Ah! But he was so rude to Reika-sama. How unforgivable.”

“No, I did not mind at all.”

The girls who were in a daze suddenly followed up on their comments to appease me. I really don’t mind. Instead, I’m thankful for his rescue. Yep, you really were a righteous guy, weren’t you, Silver Hair-kun.

But wow, good job seeing those tiny piercings beneath the hair. Or was it that somebody tattled?

“As I recall, it was this Student Council President that went head to head with Emperor in last year’s cavalry battle, wasn’t it.”

“Actually, I thought he was cool too...”

“Eh-, actually, so did I...”

Oh ho~? It looks like he already has a number of fans. And he’s more approachable than the unattainable Kaburagi and Enjou duo.

“What was his name again?”

“Mizusaki-kun. Mizusaki Arima-kun,”

I answered fluently.

Everyone gaze me a surprised look, but of course I know him.

Because I've always secretly sympathised with him!

As for why, it's because he was in Kimidol, and as Emperor's love rival who lost in the end, to me, he's a fellow stalking horse!

Arima(has a horse) is an Atema(stalking horse)? Pfftpfftpfft, so silly.

But although we're both stalking horses, his position was decisively different to Kisshouin Reika's. He never did anything dirty like Reika did, and fought Emperor head-on until the end. Because of that, he even formed a friendship between men with Emperor.

After spending all that time expressing your love for her, in the end you have your heroine snatched away? Truly a stalking horse! If I'm the evil stalking horse, then you're the good stalking horse! We're stalking horse comrades!

You had silver hair in the manga, so it feels a little odd that your hair is black, but I think you look great like this too, Fellow Stalking Horse.

And well, to begin with nobody in Japan, or rather, nobody on earth actually grows silver hair. I think you'd look good if you dyed it silver too, but you definitely wouldn't, would you.

You know, it really was cool seeing the manga cover with black-haired Emperor and the silver-haired President flanking the heroine.

But anyway, I'm your ally, Fellow Stalking Horse. I'll watch over you, so feel free to head straight down your stalking horse highway!

"Reika-sama? Is something the matter?"

"No, nothing of the sort."

Everybody watched me with strange expressions. No good, no good.

I smiled and pretended nothing happened.

Fellow Stalking Horse's warning was of no use because Tsuruhana-san and co. were indulging in Kaburagi appreciation as usual.

And their hostility towards us became more and more obvious.

Just recently, Tsuruhana-san finally knocked into me on purpose.

"My, I'm so sorry, Kisshouin-san. Are you okayy?"

"...Yes."

"You're not very athletic and you're slow too, so you really need to take more care of yourself."

TWITCH.

Tsuruhana-san and a few girls were snickering, but the other girls around realised things were bad and exchanged a look.

"Hey! What do you think you're doing to Reika-sama!"

"It was an accident, I said. You're so annoying."

"Whatt did you sayy!"

Oh crap, it's turning into an issue. I stopped them in a panic.

It looks like Serika-chan and the others are close to their limit.

I guess I can't hold on for much longer...

Today I went to my favourite hair salon.

Phew, I can finally relax. At Okaasama's orders, I had the usual. Treatment for my hair, and a trim for its ends too.

I elegantly enjoyed the herb tea they brought out.

“Ah-, this is...”

The beautician was fiddling with my hair when her eyes went wide.

Mn? What’s wrong?

“Reika-sama, you have a white hair back here.”

EEEEEEHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!

“W-, White hair!?”

“Yes. It’s the middle so it isn’t very noticeable though. See?”

It felt like my heart would stop from the shock.

In the opposite mirror, there certainly was some white hair on the back of my head.

Speaking of which, lately the back of my head has been feeling a little funny. I thought that perhaps a spirit was possessing me, but that was me growing white hair?

It’s the stress. I grew white hair because of stress. Didn’t that happen to the Rococo Queen as well!

A maiden in her third year of middle school with white hair...

“It’s okay, Reika-sama. It’ll go back to normal in no time. It wouldn’t be good to pluck it, so I’ll snip it at the base. And let’s give you a head spa too. It’s not too good to be too tense.”

“...Please.”

I walked unsteadily over to the shampoo stand.

I'm done. At this rate, my whole head will turn white.

Trading the silver-haired President for the white-haired Queen...

I resolved myself and made my decision.

CHAPTER 67

Today, my hair was curled extra perfectly. Last night I used a sheet mask that cost as much as 10,000 Yen per sheet, so my skin was soft and glossy too.

My appearance was completely faultless today!

After washing down my stomach medicine with some water, I took out my favourite fan from my chest of drawers. It's been getting warm recently, so I don't think it looks unnatural.

It's a dainty and beautiful European folding fan with butterfly-pattern black ribs, wrapped in violet and wine red leaves of a flower design. A perfect prop for my battle. I grasped it tightly in my hand.

I am an actress, I am an actress... An actress! Actress! Actress!

Sally forth! To the frontlines!

The issue is when to take action. I'd like to avoid doing it during breaktime because of all the people here.

I guess there's no option except after school. They don't usually leave right after class, so I guess that's my chance.

I hope it goes well.

"What a lovely fan, Reika-sama."

"Thank you. I very much like it too."

I fiddled with the folding fan in my hand.

When our eyes met, Tsuruhana-san snorted again as well, today.

I can't delay things any longer. I need to settle this before any more white hairs appear.

I waited impatiently for school to end. And I had plenty of stomach medicine to

accompany me while I did.

Since it's scary by myself, I think I'll have Serika-chan and Kikuno-chan flank me.

After a long time, school finally ended.

With fan in hand, I left my seat.

"Serika-san, could you accompany me for a little while? I was thinking of having a word with Tsuruhana-san and her friends."

Serika-chan's eyes glinted with a sharp light.

She began texting for her best friend Kikuno-chan. Serika-chan was thirstier for blood than I was.

The other girls began gathering around us too.

"Well then, shall we go?"

When I curled my lips upwards, everyone gave a cold smile to match.

When we left our classroom, it didn't take long to find her. She was coming our way, surrounded by her gyarus.

All the students who planned on leaving early had left, leaving us a hallway devoid of others.

As I continued to open and close my fan, my eyes met with Tsuruhana-san's.

"You're in my way, Kisshouin-san. Mind moving?"

Tsuruhana-san gave me a challenging smile, and her followers all started to snicker

too.

The girls around me immediately seethed with malice.

Shutting my fan with a snap, I said,

“Tsuruhana-san. Who exactly do you think you are speaking to?”

“Hah?”

Taking a step forward, I continued.

“Say, Tsuruhana-san. When on earth did you gain the right to speak to *me* in such a manner? A normal student like you, to a Pivoine member like me.”

I pointed my fan at her and suddenly glared dangerously.

I could see the confidence in her eyes shake.

“It appears that the Pivoine’s influence has dwindled quite a bit. It surely has, has it not? For a person *like you* to take this attitude *with me*.”

I drew closer.

“Oh. Or were you perhaps instead implying that the Tsuruhana family is even greater than the Kisshouin family? *I had no idea*. I never knew that my Kisshouin family had grown inferior to the Tsuruhana.

But it seems that *you* at least, see it that way, correct?

Or is that how the *entire* Tsuruhana family sees it? That the Kisshouin family is one to make light of, that is.

If that is the case, I must really have a word with my father. It seems like we will have *a lot to ‘deal with.’*”

“Say,” I continued with a smile, as she grew paler and paler. “You know, I very much dislike conflict. Because of that, I have overlooked your behaviour for a long time. But lately, you seem to have gotten *a little* full of yourself. Do you not think so?”

“...”

“Or could it be, Tsuruhana-san, that your behaviour was actually a declaration of war? If that truly is the case, then with my power as a Pivoine, as well as with all my power as a Kisshouin, *I do not mind keeping you company.*”

Finally, grazing her cheek with my fan, I whispered into her ear,

“*Well?*”

Tapping the silent and still girl with my fan, I prompted her for an answer.

“...My deepest apologies, Reika-sama,”

she replied bitterly and painfully, her skin still white as a sheet.

I responded with the sweetest smile I could muster.

“Goodness. As long as you understand, I shall not give you any trouble, you know? Because I truly find no amusement in crushing you. As long as you refrain from irritating me, all shall be well. Are we clear?”

“...I understand.”

“Well then, good friends of Tsuruhana-san, are we clear as well? Of course, if you are dissatisfied, please feel free to speak. As long as you are prepared for the

consequences,” I added, slapping the fan onto my palm.

All of her friends hung their heads as well, expressing their joint agreement.

“Good. It brings me such joy that you are all so understanding. Please have a little moderation in your actions from now on. Well then, everybody, gokigen’you.”

After giving a final, dark, Enjou-styled smile, I turned my back to them, my skirt fluttering behind me.

All of my followers followed suit and bade them farewell, before following behind me. Because I suddenly noticed a gaze, I looked forward to find Kaburagi giving me a disgusted look before walking away.

“You did it, Reika-sama! I feel so refreshed!”

“That look on her face! It serves her right!”

When we arrived back in the classroom, all of the girls erupted in joy.

But almost none of their voices reached my ears.

What the hell was that look.

That look that was completely looking down on me. What the hell was that!

Who do you think pushed me into doing something like this!

DON’T MESS WITH ME, YOU DUMBASS!

“I need to head to the Pivoine for a little!”

“Eh-, Reika-sama!?”

I flew out of the classroom.

The last thing I wanted was to use the power of my family.

But I didn't have any other way. Could I have helped it?

I know that if our family ever falls into ruin, doing this is only going to bite me back.

What would I do if I get treated like Sara?

The prosperous eventually decline. Pride will have a fall. I don't *wanna* live in a city beneath the wavesss!

Wai-, hey! Even while I'm agonising here, he still has no idea, does he!

Kaburagi, I hope your whole head turns white!

When I arrived at the salon, Kaburagi was enjoying tea with Enjou. I strode right towards them, and Kaburagi gave me a puzzled look.

"Kaburagi-sama, I need to have a word with you."

"...What?"

"Could you take some responsibility and begin cleaning up after your own messes? Could you not at least control your own followers?"

"It's not like I tell them to follow me. They just make trouble on their own. To begin with, I don't even pay attention to them. And I have no recollection of accepting them as my followers."

"Because they made the decision to follow you, it is none of your business, you say? So you dare to say something so irresponsible. It truly makes one question whether you even have what it takes to be the next leader of the Kaburagi Group."

"What did you say!"

“Did I misspeak? If you cannot even properly handle such a tiny group of people, I can scarcely imagine the difficulties you will have in the future.”

Since he glared at me, I glared back at him.

Around that time, Enjou stepped in.

“Now, now, you calm down too, Kisshouin-san. Aren’t you letting the blood rush to your head a little?”

This time I glared at him.

“Could *you* stop pushing your friend’s problems onto me? I believe I have more than paid back the debt. I’m *sick* of cleaning up after you.”

“Oi!”

“Masaya. Yeah, sorry about that. I’ve caused you trouble, huh.”

I don’t feel even a speck of sincerity from your apology, you know.

“Well then, I take my leave. Gokigen’you.”

Leaving the salon, I decided to just skip my lessons, and headed straight home.

I was excited from my victory against Tsuruhana-san, and rash because of my anger at Kaburagi, but once all that cooled down I became terrified.

I went and said something unbelievable to Kaburagi.

Because I was so agitated, I had lost all sense of judgement. And of all things, I went

and picked a fight with Kaburagi!
I've done it now. I've so done it now.
Oh my godd...
But it was all his fault, okay! I didn't do anything wrong!

The moment I reached home, I hid under my futon and trembled.
And then at some point I grew angry again and fell asleep as I sulked.
When I woke up, I binged on salad-flavoured rice crackers.

Even though I tried so hard to become an easy-to-get-along-with character, because of that stupid Kaburagi, I sped straight down the road to Domineering Reika-sama, didn't I!
Goddammittttt, I'll open a pack of mugichoco too!



Mugichoco. Puffed barley cereal, coated in sweet milk chocolate.

.....That embarrassing actress mode became some splendid dark history.
Who on earth was I even channelling. Just remembering it makes me want to writhe.
Geez. Why was Kaburagi even watching that.

CHAPTER 68

The next day, I was afraid of going to school.

I was already nervous about people looking at me differently because I unveiled ‘Domineering Reika-sama’, but I also went and disparaged Kaburagi in the salon, so if that spread I’d be completely isolated.

And as for how angry Kaburagi was... Just imagining it was terrifying!

Looking left and right for any enemy attacks, I carefully entered the classroom.

He wasn’t here yet. But I can’t let down my guard.

“Good morning, Reika-sama.”

“Gokigen’you, Reika-sama.”

My friends all greeted me with a smile. What nice smiles. Is it because they got to vent their pent-up feelings?

“Gokigen’you.”

I sat down at my seat. And then people gathered around me.”

“Uhuhu, yesterday was terribly refreshing, wasn’t it, Reika-sama.”

Serika-chan was wearing a cruel smile.

One of Tsuruhana-san’s group was sitting in the corner of the classroom, and when our eyes met by chance, she looked away frightened.

Uh oh. Did I threaten them too much?

“Say, everybody. Those girls seem to be reflecting already, so let us not continue this. I

have already forgiven them.”

“Eh, but,”

“I do not think that Kaburagi-sama would look well upon us girls being so vicious to each other.”

Everyone looked like they realised some shocking revelation.

Well, it’s not really something I should be saying after picking a fight with him though.

“If *you* say so, then...”

After giving each other a look, everybody nodded. Thank goodness. Kaburagi is incredibly effective, isn’t he. On the other hand, I can only imagine how quickly they’ll abandon me if they know I became Kaburagi’s enemy.

“Kyah! It’s Emperor and Enjou-sama!”

“Eh-”

Kaburagi, and for some reason Enjou as well, suddenly entered the classroom. Oh crap, are they here to announce my death sentence!? Are they here to take me to the guillotine!?

My heart pounded as I waited for the enemy’s move. Geh-! He’s coming this way!

The girls sitting around me displayed some unwanted consideration and parted left and right. Kaburagi was right in front of my eyes now.

M-, My stomach...

Suddenly, his fist smacked down on my head.

“NGYAH-!”

OW! I-I BELIEVE IN NON-VIOLENCE! AND I LET OUT A WEIRD VOICE!

“We’re even now.”

As I was cradling my head and moaning, Kaburagi left those words before heading back to his seat.

Hah?

“Aahh, sorry about that, Kisshouin-san. I kiiinda have something to talk to you about. Are you free?”

All of my followers started kicking up a fuss again. Ah, deja vu.

But it was impossible to refuse this time. I want a peaceful school life.

My friends seemed to be having another terrible misunderstanding, because I was seen off under their envious gazes. As I rubbed my head, I was once again taken to that staircase.

Scary... Is this guy my executioner!?

“Is your head okay? He really shouldn’t have hit you. But well, at least that’s his way of apologising.”

“Apologising?”

You apologise by punching people in the head?

“We had a good talk after you left, yesterday. We realised that we were being kind of irresponsible, and reflected on it. But Masaya’s just stubborn, so he couldn’t bring himself to apologise honestly. That’s why he said stuff about being even instead.”

What the heck. What a loser emperor.

But then, does that mean that Kaburagi isn't angry anymore?

I'm not going to be enemies with all the Kaburagi fans?

"I explained to everyone in the salon. I told them that we did something to make you angry. Luckily there weren't too many people. I made sure to forbid them from speaking, so there shouldn't be any rumours."

"Um, thank you very much."

"Also, I've reflected on what I did as well. Sorry."

Enjou gave me a bow.

Uwah, being apologised to makes it scarier and scarier!

"Ummmmmm, so does that mean that we will forget about what happened yesterday?"
I asked timidly.

"Of course," he nodded.

Is he really being honest~? Is he actually still plotting something~? Sooo suspicious~

"Your expression says that you don't trust me at all. Am I really so untrustworthy?"

Er, I can't really say that to your face, so I'm going to pretend I didn't hear it. What a great skill this is.

"I really do feel bad though. As an apology for Masaya's punch too, please give me a

good hit.”

Ehh, is this his plan to get more blackmail material?

But well, I still want vengeance for my stomach and hair.

But I’ll pass, since it’s suspicious. And I’m an ojousama. Violence is just beyond me.

“If you don’t at least hit me, I won’t be able to feel at ease. Don’t worry, and just hit me. Although I’m not Masaya, this time we’ll really count it as even, okay?”

“You truly will not hold a grudge? For example, using this to threaten me later.”

“I won’t, I said.”

Hmmmm~ Then should I just do it?

Enjou leant his face forward a little to make it easier to punch.

I see. Well then.

“GUH-!”

A gouging hook to the solar plexus.

If I hit you on the face, everybody would see, right? It’s a basic skill to hit where they can’t see.

“Well then, I suppose we truly are even now. Right, Enjou-sama?”

Enjou quickly nodded again and again as he clutched his stomach.

Alright!

I left Enjou behind and returned happily to my classroom.

I don’t really get it, but I somehow managed to escape the guillotine! Looks like the Rococo Queen escaped being turned into a dullahan!

Maybe I'll reward myself later with some high calorie Annatorte~



Annatorte, a signature cake of Café Demel, famous also for its Sachertorte. Layers of chocolate sponge and chocolate butter cream, with a strong chocolate taste and a hint of hazelnut.

With all of the annoyances settled, I passed each day in great spirits.

At Sakura-chan's demand, I went and investigated Akizawa-kun and that kouhai girl.

Hmmm~ I guess you *could* say that they're close?

But in the end I wasn't sure, so I decided to ask the man himself.

I quietly followed Akizawa-kun and waited for my chance. When there was nobody else around, I softly whispered out to him.

"Akizawa-kun, Akizawa-kun."

"UWAH-! Kisshouin-san!? Why are you in the shadows like that?"

Is there really a need to be that surprised?

"There was a little something I wanted to ask you."

"Eh-, what?"

"To be blunt, what kind of relationship do you have with Toriumi-san?"

"Eh-!"

Akizawa-kun gave me a startled expression. Oh my?

“Why are you asking something like that?”

“I was told to investigate.”

“...Sakurako, huh. Kisshouin-san, you seem to be quite close to her. Even though she’s so afraid of strangers.”

Afraid of strangers? That queen with the tongue of poison? Does Akizawa-kun not know her true self?

“I cannot reveal my client. Well? What kind?”

“Ehhhhh... I don’t really...”

“Just a normal senpai-kouhai relationship?”

“Hmmm.”

“What a terribly vague attitude. She gave you a Valentine’s chocolate, did she not? Was it obligatory? It cannot be that it was a serious one?”

“...I guess she might have written something like that in the card?”

What the! So Sakura-chan really *was* on the mark!? I’m sorry for making light of you.

“Don’t tell anybody, okay?”

“Naturally. Well, what did you do?”

“I told her sorry and rejected her. And she said that she understood. That should have been the end, but the other day Neesan went and spoke about how I got a chocolate from a girl in front of Sakurako. Apparently Neesan just decided to enter my room.”

“Goodness.”

“And then Sakurako asked me why I kept it hidden.”

Uwahh, interrogation by Sakura-chan? How scaryy.

“It feels like Sakurako’s been angry the whole time since then. What do I do?”

“Hmmm. How about asking her out on a date?”

“Eh-, a date!?”

“Yes. Lately you have been doing nothing but training, so I think she has been lonely. I am sure she would be overjoyed to go on a date with you. As for where, let me see... How about paddle boating at Inokashira Park? It is quite a standard couple’s spot.”



Inokashira Park in western Tokyo. A popular tourist attraction.

“But a date? We’re not really like that, but... Mn, I’ll try it. Thanks, Kisshouin-san.”

“Not at all.”

I saw him off with a smile.

But maan~ I did pretty good, huh!

I even received some info on Toriumi-san from one of Ririna’s underlings, but it looks like I won’t have to use it.

May fortune smile upon the clichéd osananajimi couple!

CHAPTER 69

It's time for the class trip again, or the 'learning excursion' as it's officially called. The middle school trip goes to Los Angeles in America. I tried my very best to cut down on the luggage, but I ended up needing both a suitcase and a carry on bag. But I had to pack enough blouses for a few days, as well as spare uniform jackets and skirts. I needed clothes other than my school uniform too, and I'm bringing a few shoes too, so in the end my suitcase was full in an instant. Then again, vacations with your family would have even more luggage, so I think I did pretty well this time. I sure am looking forward to it~

The trip is technically for 'learning', but we're just sightseeing and aren't learning a thing.

For example we went to visit places like the Chinese Theatre and Beverly Hills, and then did some shopping at Rodeo Drive.

There, we went to that famous jeweller known for its blue box, and my close friends and I bought matching necklaces to commemorate the occasion.

We discussed the motifs like the heart, keys, leaves etc. and in the end we chose a cross. Everyone put theirs on right after purchase. The blouse of my uniform covered it up, but it was new and matching, so just wearing it lifted my spirits. It's so friend-like to have matching stuff! I kind of want to shop even more now.

Everything was listed in dollars, and since I'm paying for things by card, my money sense was a bit messed up. Before I knew it, my two hands were filled with spoils of war. It's scary how I bought all this stuff I don't even need. I'm not going to look at any windows anymore.

The hotel we're staying at is a first class hotel fit for Suiran. Dinner was mostly hearty meat dishes. As expected of America. There was a lot.

I felt bad leaving stuff on the plate, so I decided to clean up every meal. It was delicious, so it was no problem.

Or so I thought, but it didn't take long for my stomach to feel weird. I guess eating so much meat every day might be a bit much for me. And it wasn't just dinner, it was lunch too. Does this country have nothing but meat!

Anyway, there was just a lot of it, so I desperately needed bread to go with it. Actually, just the bread enough would have been fine. I love carbohydrates, so eating meat, meat, meat is really tough on me. I want to eat tofu. My stomach feels oddly heavy...

Serika-chan, who was staying in the same room as me, said,

"It's a bit hard eating all this before bed, isn't it."

But Serika-chan, you left some meat on your plate, didn't you?

I get the feeling that everyone's faces have gotten rounder during this trip...

I brought some snacks as emergency rations in case I didn't like the food here, but my stomach feels so bad I don't even want to touch them.

At night I did some exercises with Serika-chan, said to help with digestion, but it didn't feel like it worked at all.

After that we went on a field trip to a protestant school.

It's not even a sister school, so why are we here? I thought, but just going around eating, buying, and playing at amusement parks wouldn't constitute much learning, so I guess they added this to the itinerary for show.

In front of real Christians, I suddenly felt guilty about the cross I was wearing under my uniform. I noticed the other girls were looking around at each other's blouses too.

"Perhaps we really should have gone with flowers or a heart."

"Yes..."

But it was a lovely school with a nice sense of freedom. When I saw all these American schoolgirls lying about on the wide garden, I was like *It's just like a foreign drama!* and got all excited. It kind of made me want to study abroad.

We ended up having lunch at that school as well.

I've actually been secretly looking forward to it. The school is vegetarian so there won't be meat! My stomach can finally have a break!

Now then, I wonder what we'll have? Or so I wondered with sparkling eyes, but they carried out something completely brown.

I timidly had a taste...

...This is bad. What is this strange flavour.

I don't know what this is, but it might be worse than hospital food. I don't think even *I* can eat this. What's 'gluten'?

Thanks to the rapid meat attack I've been forced to endure, I'd be fine skipping a meal but...

Looking around, I found that nobody else was really eating either. I guess they're the same as me. Why couldn't they have just given us salad. Why did they give us this weird-tasting weird-textured stuff.

Incidentally, Kaburagi was eating indifferently.

It's a little surprising.

I was sure that Kaburagi was the type to leave behind anything he didn't like.

This food is definitely untasty, but Kaburagi hadn't let out a peep about it.

...Yeah. This school prepared us with this food, so it would be rude to leave stuff behind. I'm reflecting.

I began learning from Kaburagi and forced myself to eat. But, uu... It tastes so bad. How on earth is he keeping his poker face, eating this stuff!?

In the end, we were offered a choice between carrot cake and mint cake, and when I chose the latter out of curiosity, this bright blue cake was brought out to me. This is impossible...

I met eyes with Kaburagi. He looked at me, and then at my cake, and then had this expression like I was some pitiful weirdo. What the heck!

After that, we just went to amusement parks every day.

Thinking about it, this is my first time going with my Suiran friends. That kind of makes me happy!

In my excitement, I rode one ride after another, and then ended up motion sick...

America's D*sneyland is a lot more exciting, and also a lot scarier than Japan's. And aren't these rides a lot longer too?

Maybe it's the curse of the meat dishes, but I'm feeling terrible.

I guess I'll need to rest for a bit.

"Are you all right, Reika-sama?"

"Yes. I think I will be fine after a little rest. Please pay me no mind and continue enjoying the rides."

Worried about me, Serika-chan and the girls suggested staying with me, but I had them enjoy themselves instead. They said they would come back to check on me after the first ride, but I told them not to worry and just have fun. Plus, some other girls seemed to want a rest too.

While I was sitting on a bench and spacing out, I saw Kaburagi and Enjou walk past. Kaburagi seemed to be enjoying himself, unlike his usual poker face. So he actually liked amusement parks?

Together with his guy friends, Kaburagi was briskly walking from ride to ride. And behind him followed Tsuruhana-san's group. They've all got so much energy.

Everyone is in casual clothing today, so it was hard to tell Suiran students from the other tourists. Well, it's a big place. I wonder if there's anyone else I know~

Wha-, ah!

It's Maiden Class Rep walking together with Miharuru-chan!

There were other kids with them too, but Class Rep and Miharuru-chan are going to the attractions together!

Damniittt! An amusement park date? I'm so jealous!

A while later when my friends came back, a bunch of male students were with them. Apparently they met each other in the lines, so they rode the rides together. They're kinda looking at each other and smiling.

Eh-, why did everyone go on pseudo-dates while I wasn't around!?

And why did the boys leave once the girls reached my side? Aren't we supposed to go on more rides together?

Could it be... No, it's your imagination. It's okay, Reika. Don't think about it.

At night we went to the haunted house. It was night, so somehow the atmosphere was just better.

"Speaking of which, apparently a ghost appeared at last year's summer camp."

"Right, right. A girl from Class 5 saw it. A dripping wet yuurei woman!"

"I heard that she was gnawing a corpse."

Everyone started talking about how scary it was.

I'm the one who's scared, okay. The rumours just keep spreading...

"Reika-sama, didn't you participate in last year's summer camp as well?"

"Yes. But I don't know anything about it at all."

I'm definitely not going again this year.

After coming back from my meat galore trip, I gained three kilos. What do I do!
And it feels like all the girls except me are closer to the boys now! Why!?

CHAPTER 70

Note:

Class Rep's POV begins around Chapter 37.

Monk Boy's POV begins around Chapter 64.

Year 5 was my first time being in the same class as Kisshouin-san.

She was a particularly conspicuous girl, so I had known about her before that, though. A member of the famous Pivoine, and the young lady of the Kisshouin family. A hairdo like a princess. Beautiful, but a little scary, and very difficult to approach.

That was my first impression of her. And once she was surrounded by her friends, her impact only increased.

I don't know why, but somehow I ended up being class representative with her during Year 6.

Normally, nobody from the Pivoine would agree to such a role. And of all people, to think it was that Kisshouin-san who ended up as class rep.

But thinking about it now, in 5th Grade she was part of the executive committee for the athletics meet. Looking back, I was surprised back then too.

I was a little nervous about being class rep with her. Kisshouin-san's group is quite harsh to boys that aren't Kaburagi-kun or Enjou-kun.

But surprisingly, Kisshouin-san did all her jobs as vice rep properly. Particularly striking was that her grip on the girls made everything go more smoothly.

And once Kisshouin-san came around, even the boys who often forgot their hand-ins would hurriedly bring them the next day.

It's amazing. It's not like she threatened them either, but there was just this silent pressure around her.

It kind of made you want to shout "The Boss Lady is here!"

Anyway, about that Kisshouin-san. When I called her out to help with work, she would respond quite normally.

She looks like *that*, and even the way she speaks is your model Suiran ojousama, but she was surprisingly... amiable?

Even when I asked her to help with chores, she agreed without a problem. Could it be that she's actually one of those people that can't say no?

I actually wanted to be class rep with Honda-san just like last year, but I might be lucky to have gotten Kisshouin-san since we have our class trip this year.

Honda-san. I have a crush on Honda Miharuru-san.

I started liking her last year while we were class reps together, but I couldn't find the courage to really talk to her.

When I went to the matchmaker shrine, I got Great Blessing though.

I wonder if Kisshouin-san could give me some advice. I'm kind of hoping to get a message from Honda-san in my graduation yearbook.

When I told Kisshouin-san this, she happily agreed to help me.

Ever since that day, I've occasionally consulted Kisshouin-san for love advice.

When I became a middle schooler, I ended up in Kisshouin-san's class again. And again, we ended up being class reps together.

I'm not timid around her any more, and the two of us talk without a problem. But her appearance is as hard to approach as ever.

If you look carefully though, sometimes there are moments when her image collapses. One time, she was walking through the garden at lunch break. I was passing by coincidentally, but a bird pooped on her head in that very moment!

"Kyaa! Reika-sama!"

“A bird...! On Reika-sama...!”

The girls around her started shouting things like,

“Quickly! To the infirmary!” and “It’s all right! It will come off in a flash! Please keep a hold of yourself!”

and took the dumbfounded Kisshouin-san away as though to hide her.

And to think that it hit her out of all those girls...

I’ll never forget how her eyes almost rolled back.

Speaking of which, she was surrounded by deers during our primary school class trip too. Maybe she has some bad karma with animals.

That day, Kisshouin-san left school early.

Kisshouin-san fell in love.

The guy was a third year, the Student Council President. Kisshouin-san seems to be trying to hide it, but I immediately noticed.

After all, even when I was given things to take to the Student Council Room, she could snatch it away from the side.

And each time she came back from the StuCo Room, she would be muttering to herself with a smile.

You can’t, Kisshouin-san! If somebody sees you like that, they’ll think that you’re a weirdo!

I tried telling her in a round-about way.

“Kisshouin-san, did something good happen? You seem really happy.”

“Goodness...” she replied, with her face covered by her hands.

Thank goodness. She stopped after that.

But the Student Council President, huh. Is she into those charismatic types?

Kisshouin-san’s love didn’t seem to be working out. I haven’t made any progress with Honda-san, so I really know how you feel!

While we were talking, she told me about a matchmaking shrine here in Tokyo.

It’s embarrassing for a guy to go by himself, but since she went out of her way to tell me, I decided to go after all.

“Kisshouin-san, I checked out the shrine and got a fortune too.”

“My. Is that so. How was the fortune?”

“Mn, unfortunately I only got Middle Blessing.”

“I see...”

“You got one too, didn’t you. How was it?”

“...I got Blessing.”

“Ah, I see. That’s a shame.”

“...”

Is she making that weird expression because she got Blessing? Then again, you can’t really call it a good result, so.

Kisshouin-san quietly clucked her tongue. A girl shouldn't do things like that, Kisshouin-san.

After a while, Kisshouin-san completely stopped making her visits to the Student Council.

Oh? That's weird, I thought, so I asked her,

"You haven't been going to the Student Council recently, have you?"

but with a dreadful expression she said,

"Did you know, Class Rep? First loves never bear fruit, you know~ They never bear fruit~ Class Rep!"

and chased after me like she was cursing me. That's scary, Kisshouin-san!

When we parted that day, just before she left, she turned around and grinned at me.

Demons, begone!

When I got home later, I wrote my first love poem. I'll exorcise this taint through poetry!

Incidentally, for some reason Kisshouin-san will say pensively every autumn,

"It's the season for moon viewing, isn't it~"

I guess despite all her quirks, she's still Kisshouin Reika. How refined.

She might be an oddball in a few places, and sometimes she looks at couples with resentful eyes, but the soft-hearted and occasionally silly Kisshouin-san is somebody I really like.

But I have to say, *he* observes her quite a bit too. During the bird poop incident, he was smiling away.

Enjou-kun is my idol.

He does everything with a smile on his face, and even though he never looks like he studies very hard, his grades are always top class.

Rather than Kaburagi-kun who's like an absolute and charismatic ruler, I prefer Enjou-kun's gentle atmosphere more.

Even when Kaburagi-kun stays quiet, people get this urge to serve him. He's good at sports and academics. His pedigree and wealth are beyond criticism too. He's perfect. Sometimes when I see him gazing out the window, I can't help but feel how much more mature he is than me. But all that makes him too scary to approach.

In that regard, Enjou-kun is the opposite because of how he always talks to people with a smile.

When I entered my first year of middle school, I ended up in the same class as Enjou-kun. I was class rep, but between the schism with the Internals and Externals, and all the girls gunning for Enjou-kun, everything was just insane.

Each time it was Enjou-kun who would ask me "Are you okay?" and help me out. Whenever the girls who liked him became too much, he would always warn them gently so that they wouldn't be hurt. When it came to the Externals, he would direct them to the right people and committees to help them acclimate to the school.

That casual consideration for people...! My fellow rep Honda-san was entranced by him too.

In my third year of middle school, I was worried about how I was class rep for Kaburagi-kun's class. Enjou-kun suggested Kisshouin-san for the vice rep.

Isn't Kisshouin-san the female version of Kaburagi-kun!

She's always smiling and surrounded by her friends, the number one girl that you don't want to make an enemy of.

If Kaburagi-kun is the Emperor, then Kisshouin-san is the Empress. Scaryy!

But in the end, Kisshouin-san agreed. As expected of Enjou-kun. To think he could even persuade Kisshouin-san.

As for Kisshouin-san herself, she turned out to be easier to talk to than I'd expected.

But I'm still a little nervous. The pressure from the girls behind her is especially nerve-wracking...

Anyway, a certain group of girls waved the flag of revolt against her. It was Tsuruhana-san's group.

Sparks flew between the two groups for a while, but Kisshouin-san herself simply wore a relaxed smile like they were no threat.

As vice rep she occasionally warned them for their conduct, but Tsuruhana-san's group would shrug it off, and Kisshouin-san would leave right after.

Personally, I think it would be better if she told them off a little more harshly though. But it's Kisshouin-san. She probably has some plan.

Because of the two groups, the atmosphere of the class grew strained. The only ones who didn't seem to care were Kaburagi-kun and Kisshouin-san. As expected of them. They're different to the rest of us.

But I have the feeling that something is going to happen soon. After all, Kisshouin-san's smile never reaches her eyes.

It finally happened.

This morning Kisshouin-san came in with a fan. She had more impact than ever. It was like some strange aura was being emitted from her body.

After school, Kisshouin-san left the classroom smiling, flanked by her close friends.

The remaining classmates exclaimed things like, “So she’s finally making her move!?” and “Goddess Kali is here!” in their excitement.

But everyone was too afraid of going to watch.

The next day, Tsuruhana-san’s group didn’t come to our class. When I asked my friends in other classes, they told me that the group was acting abnormally quiet.

Apparently the fight ended in Kisshouin-san’s overwhelming victory.

A hero who secretly watched the fight told me in shivers,

“Her Majesty the Queen struck down her hammer of wrath. You definitely can’t oppose the Queen!”

After that, Kaburagi-kun, famous for being cold to girls, gave Kisshouin-san a friendly rap on the head, which caused the girls to go wild. Not only that, but she was getting along with Enjou-kun too!

She really is from a different world to us. Kisshouin Reika, the scariest person to make an enemy of.

Although, when I talked to the class rep from Class 5, he told me,

“She’s just a funny person.”

Even Enjou-kun said,

“Kisshouin-san is a fun person,”

so maybe I should start looking at her without preconceptions.

But there wasn't anything particularly funny about her.

At most there were just a few instances. Like the time during the class trip when there was blue cake that everyone else gave up on, and she finished with a smile. Or how after eating that blue cake that nobody else did, she seemed to be sick for the rest of the trip. Or how at D*sneyland, for some reason she was the only one who ended up soaked, and her friends were cheering her up.

Oh, and that one time at the hotel when I caught her standing on one leg in the hallway. When I asked her what she was doing, she told me,

“This is the Tree Pose in Yoga.”

Is she doing Yoga because she's the Goddess Kali?

She told me,

“I recommend the Firefly Pose and the Eagle Pose,”

but I politely declined.

Kisshouin-san was spotted by her roommate Kazami-san, who quickly dragged her into their room.

I guess ordinary people like me will never understand somebody amazing like Kisshouin-san.

CHAPTER 71

During the summer break, I bought a stepper machine to vanquish my excess flab. Although becoming a high schooler is pretty much guaranteed in an escalator school like Suiran, I'm still technically preparing to take an exam, so I thought it would be good if I studied and exercised.

With a reference book in hand, I've been stepping on the stepper. Step step step. Recently I saw this supermodel in a magazine say,

"I don't drink anything with calories in it,"

The scales really fell from my eyes. I decided to stop drinking my favourite sweet milk tea.

I gradually grew thinner as I continued this lifestyle. At summer cram school, even Aoi-chan told me,

"You look a bit smaller now."

Yes!

Speaking of Aoi-chan, apparently she was aiming to get into a national high school so the exam is going to be pretty hard. Thanks to that, she has to start studying now. I hope she takes care of her health...

Thanks to using the stepper all summer, I ended up back at my original weight. After that I was so sick of the stepper that I chucked it into the same corner as my hula hoop.

When Term 2 started, I went to school for the first time in a while. Even though it had only been a month, I was a little shocked at how everyone seemed just a little more mature.

Especially the boys. They were just shooting up like bean sprouts. Some of them were completely different.

I've stopped growing ages ago, but I guess this is when boys really start to grow. During your growth spurts, sometimes your bone pains keep you awake, don't they. Sounds rough.

While everyone was talking about their holiday, I overheard that no ghosts appeared at this year's summer camp. Apparently the hotel performed an exorcism before the camp began... I'm so sorry.

After clearing the hurdle that was the mid-term exams, it was finally time for the Athletics Carnival.

It happens every year, but this year was special. I was in Emperor's class this time. As the class reps, Monk-kun and I had to find out who was participating in which events.

After everyone filled in the spots for the safer options, all that was left was the cavalry battle.

His Imperial Majesty was sitting in his chair with his arms crossed, gazing over the citizens.

One by one, boys who seemed confident in their arm or leg strength were nominated. The nominees all had grim expressions on their faces. Yeah. Try your best.

There were other strong-looking boys but since they had grown taller during the break they weren't used to their heights yet. Thanks to the trouble with their balance, it seems they were exempt this time. Isn't that great? Be thankful to your growth spurts.

The chosen horse members were apparently going to undergo special training at the Kaburagi house. I've always wondered where he did that each year. After all, I never

saw him doing it at school or anything.

Apparently what the training actually involves is top secret, as are the tactics. I wonder what on earth is driving him to take this cavalry battle so seriously...

Since I'm the class rep, I ended up going to the Student Council Room a lot to help prepare for the Athletics Carnival.

The President is Stalking Horse. I couldn't help but observe him in curiosity. His hair really is black to the roots.

Stalking Horse noticed my gaze and looked at me suspiciously.

"What?"

"Eh, ahh~ I was just wondering if you were joining the cavalry battle as well."

As I recall, last year he battled it out with Emperor until the end. Naturally he was no match though.

"...Are you scouting?"

"No, no, nothing of the sort."

"I am, but that's all I'm telling you."

Goodness, he's so guarded.

"Also,"

"Yes?"

“Don’t think that I’ll go easy on anybody because they’re a Pivoine.”

He looked at me with a strong gaze.

Ahhh, this guy was anti-Pivoine wasn’t he.

“That sounds perfect. Please give your all.”

But the enemy is much more of a cavalry battle maniac than Stalking Horse suspects.

I bet he’s at home practising right now.

Having finished what I needed to do, I exited the StuCo room. But before I left,

“President, have you ever wanted to dye your hair silver?”

“Silver? No way.”

Thought soo~

On the day of the Athletics Carnival, the sky was nice and clear. Perfect for the Emperor’s arrival at the battlefield.

Since Emperor was doing the baton relays as well, he practised for that too. Over and over, he drilled into the relay members how important a smooth transfer of the baton was, and made them practice countless times. So fired up. Just how is this guy supposed to be the cool-type.

Emperor’s Horse members got pretty ripped in the short time since they were chosen. Just what on earth did he do to you... And it’s scary how your eyes are all fiery. But anyway, I’d better be careful as well. If I mess up, I might anger the Emperor.

After I participated in the spoon relay and tug of war, I went to do the ball-toss event. Maybe thanks to my stepper machine, it felt like my legs had more strength now.

Picking up and throwing the balls was easier than last year.
Around that time, a ball smacked me in the back of my head.
I yelled out,

“Ow!” in reflex, and when I turned around I found a male classmate frantically apologising,

“I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to! I didn’t mean to!”

Yeah, I get that already. Could you not be so frightened of me?

For some reason it looked like everyone was throwing carefully away from me. Is this just persecution complex?

In the end, my class didn’t do well in the ball-toss. Thanks to that, the Emperor was in a bad mood when we returned. Geez~

Eventually, the fated time arrived. The cavalry battle.

The Emperor’s team arriving with the dignity of a ruler, and the one other team from our class that was being treated like a sacrificial pawn. Apparently they didn’t get any special training. Try your best on your own.

When they gave the start signal, the teams around Emperor were taken down one after another. Perhaps the other teams were trying to avoid him because they were all gathered far away.

Emperor moved to hunt them.

For the first time in a while, Night on Bald Mountain played in my head.

Thank goodness I was born a girl.

As the Emperor was taking down his enemies... suddenly, a 1st year team charged in

at the Emperor! How reckless!

“UOOHHHHHH!”

The 1st year rider bravely attacked, but he was still no match for the Emperor. First his arm was grabbed, and then not only was his headband was ripped out along with his hair, he was tossed to the ground as well.

“DAMNNIITTTTTTTT!”

No, no, I really admire your spirit, First Year-kun. You look like a muddy mess though. Emperor snorted at him atop his steed, before heading off to battle Stalking Horse. At some point, the two of them had become the last riders.

Stalking Horse was fired up too. The two riders measured the distance between each other before breaking into a gallop.

Stalking Horse was even stronger than he was last year. But the difference in the quality of their steeds was evident.

Even whilst the two riders battled up top, the horses were engaging in a kicking contest to destroy the others' balance.

In the end, Emperor timed his attack with the kicks below, and splendidly protected his victory by defeating Stalking Horse, steed and all.

After the battle, Emperor announced that he would be retiring from his participation in cavalry battles. The Cavalry Battle Emperor became a legend.

What the heck is 'retire from cavalry battles' supposed to mean, anyway...

CHAPTER 72

Winter came, and I began seriously studying for my entrance exams. I know it doesn't really matter in an elevator school, but well, may as well.

Once I enter the high school section, the newly arrived External Students will drop my rankings even lower, after all. I have to start studying now to prepare.

And so today, once again, I was studying with my home tutor.

Since Karin-sensei was looking for a job now and quit her role as tutor, the one teaching me was her younger sister, Marin-sensei. Just like Karin-sensei, she's a student at a national university. These sisters sure are smart~

"At this rate, I think you'll definitely pass your internal exams."

"Really?"

"If you continue studying like this until the last day, that is."

I see~ But if you tell me something like that I'll get lazy in no time, so please don't praise me so much.

Procrastination has been engraved in my karma since my previous life.

"Speaking of which, I rarely ever do see your Oniisama, Reika-sama."

"Yes, now that you mention it."

Ever since his coming-of-age ceremony, Oniisama has been busy with both school and our family business, so things have been hectic for him. Most of the time he isn't even back in time for dinner so I can't just casually ask him to play anymore.

But even though Oniisama is so busy that he can never get home in time for dinner, why is it that Otousama never comes home late? Otousama, aren't you overworking Oniisama?

gasp! Could it be that he found some fraud and has been busy with the cover-up!? That has to be it. Try your best, Oniisama!

I'll make him a bentou sometime. A hand-made bentou filled with his little sister's love. I'll bet he'll be happy. I'll use sakura denbu to draw a heart on the rice.



Sakura denbu, pink fish flakes often used as a topping for rice.

Get ready for a surprise, uu-pft-pft. Bentou drawings should be a good challenge for me.

“Your Oniisama is so dreamy. From all the rumours I hear, I can't even imagine that he's younger than my sister!”

“My.”

I had no idea. Marin-sensei was actually the type who loves celebrity gossip? But Oniisama really is dreamy. When he studies or reads books he puts on his glasses, and always looks really intellectual. As a fan of pretty boys with glasses, it really sends my heart beating.

“Is Oniisama your type, Marin-sensei?”

“Well, it’s a bit hard to say this but Takateru-sama is for viewing and admiration. If I was looking for a boyfriend, I’d go for somebody more normal.”

“Is there somebody like that in mind!?”

“Well, no. But I guess there’s a guy in my grade who’s been going after me~? He’s the opposite of my type though. It’s a bit embarrassing, but I prefer guys more like the vocalists in visual kei bands.”

“Goodness~ So you prefer skinny and fair-skinned guys in leather?”

“Yeah. It’s embarrassing though.”

You say you prefer normal guys, and then go for visual kei singers?

What a surprising side to a studious girl like her.

“By the way, what’s your type, Reika-sama?”

“Eh... Just what, I wonder. Perhaps somebody earnest and kind.”

I’m not sure since I haven’t liked anybody since Tomoe-senpai.

Sometimes I hear Juliet-Kasumi-senpai brag about him though. How nice~ Everyone seems to be so happy.

“The guy who’s been coming after me is earnest too but, he’s kinda... overwhelming.”

“Is he troubling you? In that case, what if you got on a boat with him at Inokashira Park?”

“Hmm, but isn’t that only for couples?”



It is said that, if you ride the boats on Inokashira Park’s pond with a girlfriend, you will surely break up soon.

Really? Sakura-chan was completely enraged though. She was like a real-life Hannya.



The Hannya (般若) mask is a mask used in Noh theater, representing a jealous female demon. It possesses two sharp bull-like horns, metallic eyes, and a leering mouth.

Honestly terrifying.

Really, it was just a bit of a joke.

“JUST BECAUSE YOU’RE SAD AND ALONE, DOESN’T MEAN THAT YOU HAVE TEAR OTHERS APART!” she said. Her expression was incredible but, Sakura-chan, you two aren’t actually a couple yet, right? And if you’re really a fated couple, then small tribulations like this are essential. Confidence in your relationship is important, okay?

Forever Alone Village, currently accepting villagers.

It was still technically an entrance exam, so I decided for a change of pace to visit a shrine and pray to the God of Learning.

I knew that they sold 'Praying for entrance' pencils, but I had no idea they even had 'Victory' headbands too.

But then on the news you often see reports about kids skipping New Years celebrations and studying frantically with a headband on their foreheads, so maybe these Victory ones are actually pretty standard?

Once you consider Emperor's abnormal obsession with headbands, maybe there's just something about them that makes people try harder.

It seemed interesting, so I bought myself one along with the pencil. And then extras for Aoi-chan too. None for Scary Hannya Sakura. She's a nagging youkai.

Aoi-chan's been getting more and more ragged by the day. I'm really worried. I wrote "Please let Aoi-chan pass" on my wooden prayer plaque, and prayed hard for her.

But even though people call Tenjin-sama the God of Learning, in life he was actually demoted wasn't he. Can he really bless us like that?

Or so went my blasphemous thoughts when a bird poop attack came. It came right down in front of me, but just as I thought I was safe I realised it hit my stockings in exchange!!

I'm sorry. I was wrong for doubting you. Please forgive me.

...Vengeful spirits are so scary. Just please don't drop lightning on me.

I never told the Nagging Youkai, but the truth is that after the Athletics Carnival, Toriumi-san spoke to me.

Naturally, about Akizawa-kun.

Apparently, she occasionally saw me chatting to Akizawa-kun about Sakura-chan, and ended up with a strange misunderstanding.

"Could you be dating?" she asked.

Noooo wayyyyy~ This girl, Sakura-chan, why does everyone look at things through this weird romance filter?

And it's weird to say this myself, but good job calling out to me, Toriumi-san. The power of love is amazing, huh.

In respect of her courage, I made sure to clear things up about Akizawa-kun and I, as well as mention,

"Apparently he is going out with his childhood friend."

"So he is dating..." she said, depressed.

In response, I told her,

"I think there is somebody else even more suitable for you, Toriumi-san."

I heard from one of Ririna's underlings, Glasses-chan, that there's actually a boy who likes her.

When I subtly suggested to Toriumi-san,

"What if you turned your eyes to the club members in your own grade?"

She was shocked.

Ummm~ Judging from the ways her eyes swam, perhaps spring is coming quite soon for a certain boy in the Track and Field Club.

Okay, *this time*, I think I did pretty good!

Nagging Youkai, I've been working pretty hard for you in the background, okay. I, the Village Chief, have a magnanimous heart.

But anyway, that Glasses-chan might look really docile but she actually has quite the gossip. Compared to a fake spy like me, she's like the real thing.

From funny stories to useful intel, she tells me all sorts of things.

I don't have many kouhai who look up to me, so Glasses-chan makes me really happy.

I asked her to call me "Reika-senpai" instead of "Reika-sama".

She also told me that the 1st Year who got beaten up in the cavalry battle started having these weird feelings of rivalry with me. Why?

"People say that Katsuragi-kun is an idiot, so please be careful," she warned.

I'm surrounded by idiots, aren't I~ From Kaburagi to Katsuragi. Even their names are similar. Life is hard.

Later on when I walked past that idiot first year, he suddenly declared,

"The likes of you aren't suitable for Enjou-san!"

The rantings of an idiot are too crazy for me to understand.

Anyway, that sad case first year might have been ambushed by my followers later...

It must be tough being singled out by a group of girls. Maybe it'll even give him a trauma.

If your hair turns white, you can come talk to me.

CHAPTER 73

It's time for the middle school graduation ceremony.

Unlike the primary graduation, I'm feeling pretty moved this time.

After all, when I enter the high school section next month, the protagonist will be entering with me. I wonder what's going to happen.

I've had some small troubles here and there, but my life at school so far has been pretty peaceful. But I can't say if that will change. I'm starting to wish Kaburagi had just stuck to Yurie-sama.

Should I try and talk him up through Aira-sama? Nothing good about him comes to mind though...

Speaking of which, Aoi-chan and Sakura-chan said that they'd be graduating today too, didn't they. Unlike Sakura-chan who's in an escalator school system like me, Aoi-chan's been studying so hard that even I was getting stressed.

When I saw her text me

"I passed without a problem,"

I felt relieved from the bottom of my heart.

"Reika-chan, it's thanks to your pencil and headband," she said. How nice.

I've been studying at home with my headband on too. Although, when I wandered about the house with it still on, I gave my family a shock.

"You don't have to take it so seriously," said Okaasama, but I was just wearing the headband to get in the mood. I wasn't feeling pressured at all.

Actually, what was *really* pressuring me was how much hot chocolate I'd been drinking. It's delicious and I love it, but my tummy got just a little bigger. Drinking it on the daily was a bit much, huh.

I brought back my hula hoop to stave off the fat though.

The graduation address was done by Kaburagi. He has the traits of a stalker, and he's an athletics carnival-loving cavalry battle idiot, but he's still the most outstanding in our grade.

I thought that these were normally given by the student council president, but hmm. Hang in there, Fellow Stalking Horse.

He certainly looked majestic reading out his address on stage. It wasn't just the female students; even the male students were captivated by him. It seems that the Emperor's display of indomitability had captured their male hearts.

Earlier, having already declared his retirement from cavalry battles, the Emperor was met with a flood of disciple applicants. That first year who got owned at the end was amongst them. Apparently he was a bundle of ambition who wanted to become the Emperor of the next generation. How nice~ that kind of determined stupidity. But geez, just how much do the boys at Suiran love cavalry battles.

The Emperor turned them all down. According to him,

"Techniques aren't things you are taught; they are things you plunder."

All of the boys seemed incredibly moved by his words. Idiots. The boys at Suiran are all idiots. We might be in trouble.

As for Enjou, even though he's usually right next to him, during the fiasco he was standing a little further away. You could tell that he was trying to declare that he had

nothing to do with these dumbasses.

Anyway, that's how it is so I was sure he'd mention cavalry battles during his address too, but it never turned up once. And the cavalry battles were definitely the highlight of middle school for him too. You endured well, Kaburagi.



Lollipop lilies are a breed of lily maculatum, a lily flower native to Japan.

When I headed outside after the ceremony, Oniisama was there!

I wasn't sure whether or not to invite him since he was so busy this year, but Oniisama guessed my feelings and told me he would come.

Since he was spoiling me anyway, I asked him to bring Urara flowers with him.

And just as promised, Oniisama brought a bouquet of flowers with Urara mixed in.

Even though you've been so busy... Thank you, Oniisama!

Since Oniisama's university graduation is coming up, I told him that I'd come running to his too, but he turned me down with a smile... Why.

Besides Oniisama, my senpai from the Pivoine came to congratulate me with flowers too, and shockingly, even Ririna's underlings brought some for me! And of all things, Ririna brought flowers too ...and then gave them to Oniisama instead of me. OI!

"Taka-niisama, please bring me lilies next year for my graduation! Lilies are Ririna's flowers!"

Won't the Emperor get angry if you claim lilies as yours?
See? Because you spoke so loudly, he turned around just now.

"Would red spider lilies not be more suitable to you, Ririna? They suit you very well."

"What on earth are you saying! Those aren't even real lilies! My flowers are the madonna lilies!"

Uwah, so shameless.

"Hmmm. I'll be working next year, so I can't really promise."

"Ehhhhhh?"

Don't worry, Ririna. I'll come with flowers for you next year. Lollipop lilies just right for you.

"Ririna, should you not be going over to congratulate Kaburagi-sama?"

"Of course I'm going."

Just like an idol, Kaburagi was holding a handshaking event in the middle of a horde of girls.

With a bouquet of blue preserved roses in hand, Ririna excitedly charged towards the circle with her gang.

Just before she was gone, she turned her head around and said,

"Oh, while I'm at it, congratulations Reika-san."

before completely running off.

Goodness, what a little tsundere...

“It looks like you two really get along now.”

“Do you think? But I suppose they do say that stupider kids are cuter.”

While I was nodding in agreement with myself,

“...That’s true. Dumber kids really are cuter,”

he agreed.

This time, Otousama made sure to bring a bouquet to compete with Oniisama.

“The Queen of the Orchids, the Cattleya. Perfect for you, Reika,” he announced proudly.

I bet it was Okaasama who picked them anyway. I can’t imagine that this pot-bellied tanuki could come up with something like this.

Hm, am I looking down on my father too much?

Ah-, Miharuchan rushed into Enjou’s crowd with a digital camera in hand. My my~ And following behind her was Class Rep with his own camera... Class Rep, shot down!? Aren’t you a little too trusting in your Middle Blessing slip?

Having taken enough photos of Kaburagi and Enjou for now, Serika-chan and the others came and invited us too. Wait, ‘together with your Oniisama’? Was that the aim from the start!?

Still, I ended up taking photos excitedly with the girls I was close to.

Unfortunately there were no guys who asked for a photo. Are there no boys out there who like me? You don’t have to be shy, okay? If you come out now, I’ll even throw in a

handshake.

...Well whatever. My luck with boys is definitely going to blossom in high school. Today, I bid farewell to my Curse fortune!

But I really am a lucky girl. So many people came to congratulate me.

I hope that in high school, and even after high school, I'll continue enjoying this happiness.



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